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ADAM GRAINGER
AND OTHER STORIES



MRS. HENRY WOOD

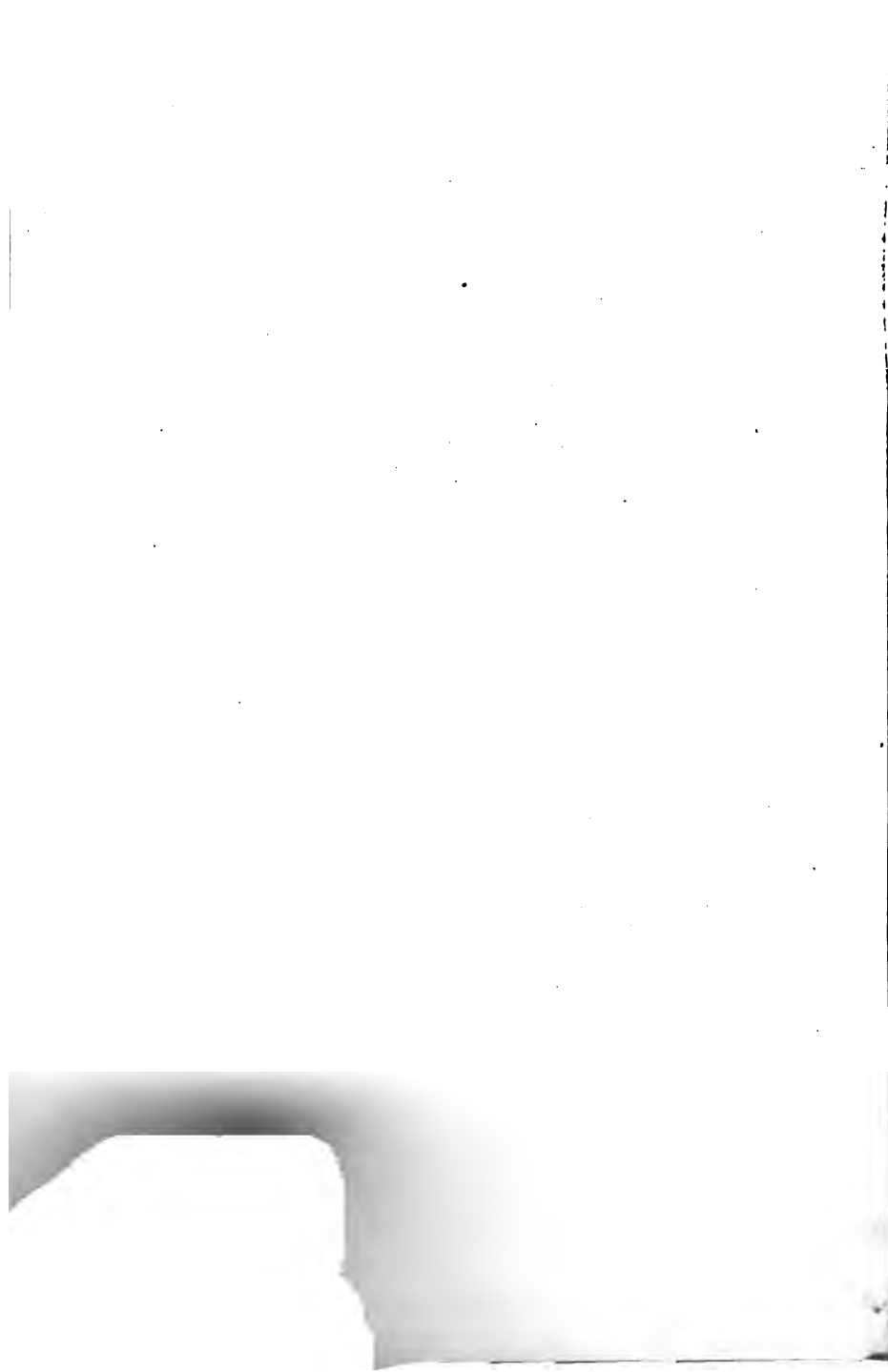
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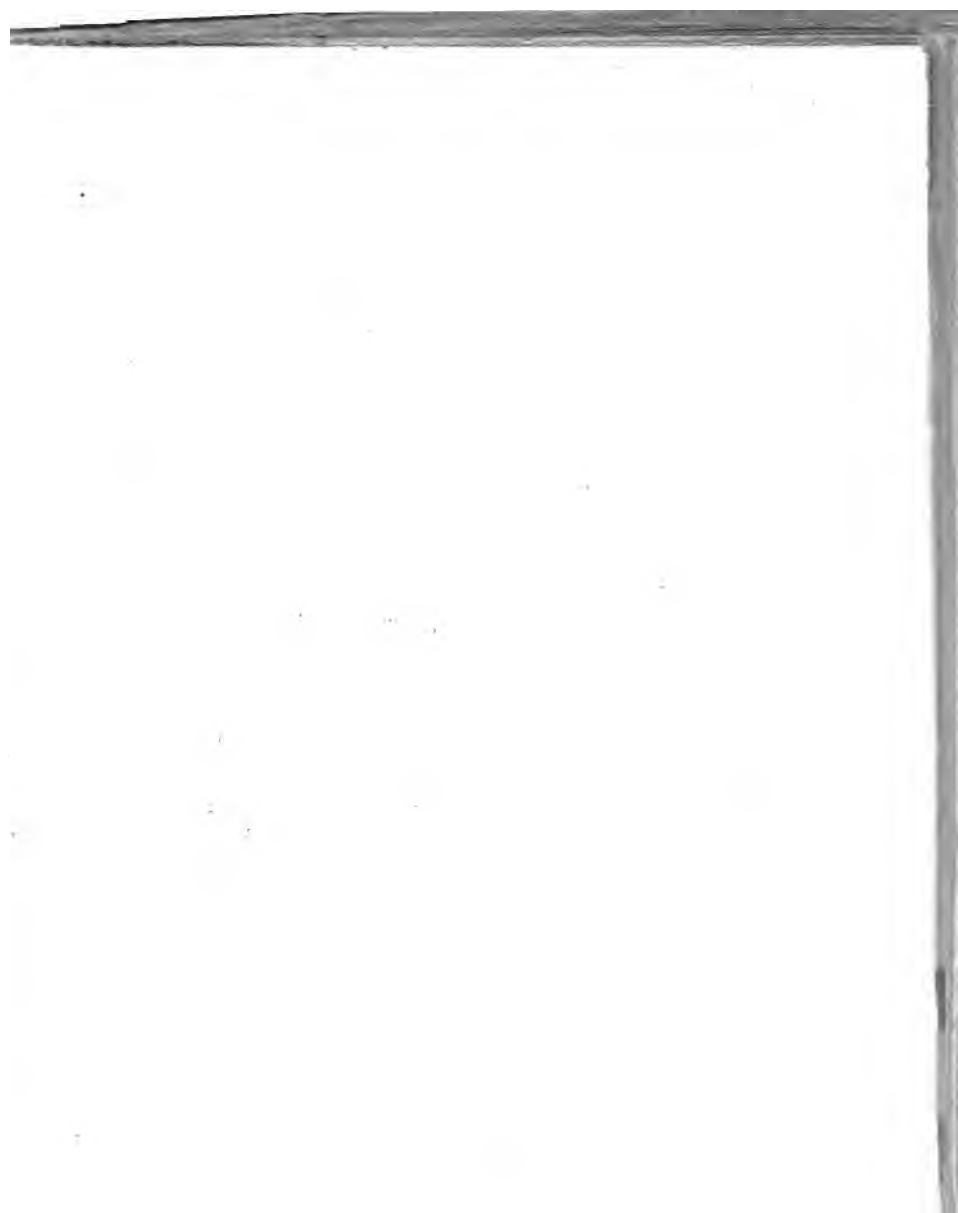
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BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD

AUTHOR OF

"EAST LYNNE," "THE CHANNINGS," "JOHNNY LUDLOW," ETC.

TWENTIETH THOUSAND

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CONTENTS.

ADAM GRAINGER:

PART THE FIRST.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MARGARET	1
II. LOST	13
III. REGRETS	25
IV. FOUND	33

PART THE SECOND.

I. SICKNESS	39
II. THE GOLDEN ERA	46
III. FIVE THOUSAND A-YEAR	66
IV. AN INTERLUDE	79
V. WITH THE DIRECTORS	105
VI. RESULTS	117

PART THE THIRD.

I. DRINKING IT TO THE DREGS	129
II. HOPELESS MISERY	138
III. A DREAM FROM HEAVEN	153
IV. THE RAY OF BRIGHTNESS	165
V. SUNSHINE	178

	PAGE
GINA MONTANI	183
A TOMB IN A FOREIGN LAND	249
KATARINA ORSINI	291
THE SELF-CONVICTED	323
A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR	361
RUPERT HALL	395
ALL SOULS' EVE	435

ADAM GRAINGER.

PART THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

MARGARET.

THE congregation came pouring out of a fashionable episcopal chapel at the West End of London; many of them; for it was the height of the season, and the chapel was popular. Nearly all the carriages drove rapidly off with their freights; about half-a-dozen only remained, waiting for those who stayed to the after-service. It had become a recent custom with the preacher, Dr. Channing, to hold it every Sunday. A regal-looking, stately girl appeared nearly last, and entered one of the carriages. The footman closed the door after her, but he did not ascend to his place, nor did the carriage drive off. It was Miss Channing, and she took her seat there to wait for her father.

Following her out almost immediately, came a tall, gentlemanly, but young man, whose bright hazel eyes were pleasant to look upon. He advanced to the carriage-door, and shook hands with her.

"You are not staying to-day, Margaret! Are you ill? I saw you hasten out."

"I felt too ill to stay," was Miss Channing's answer; whilst a rosy blush, which had stolen to her face at sound of his voice, began rapidly to fade. "I suppose it is the heat."

"You are turning deadly pale now, Margaret. I hope you will not faint. Three or four ladies were carried out this morning, I saw."

"I never fainted in my life," she replied: "I am made of sterner stuff. I shall soon be better, now I am in the air."

"Margaret——"

He looked round, as he spoke the word, to make sure that the servants were not within hearing: and that conspicuous crimson came mixing with the paleness of her face again. He resumed, in a low tone.

"Margaret, don't you think we are going on in a very unsatisfactory way? I do."

"I think," she said, as if evasively, "that you ought to remember the place we have just quitted, and choose serious subjects to converse upon."

An amused expression shone in his handsome eyes.

"If this is not a serious subject, Margaret, I should like to know what is."

"Oh, but, I mean—another sort of seriousness. You know what I mean. Adam, I shall never make you religious."

"Yes, you shall, Margaret: when you have the right to make me what you please."

"How did you like papa's sermon to-day?" she inquired hastily.

"Very much, of course."

"That portion of it about David and Saul?"

"I did not notice that," he was obliged to confess. "I do believe, Margaret, I was thinking more of you than of the sermon."

"Oh, Adam! that is so bad a habit—letting the thoughts wander in church! But it may be overcome."

"Yes, yes: I mean to overcome it, and everything else that you disapprove. Margaret, I have made up my mind to risk our chance. I shall speak to Dr. Channing."

She looked startled. "If you do, I will never speak to you again. We must wait."

"Wait—wait! That has been the burden of your song for months, Margaret. But I am growing tired of waiting. I assure you I have been in a desperate humour all this last week. Other men who are

ADAM GRAINGER

AND OTHER STORIES

established can marry when they please, and I must not even ask for you! You know Eddison?"

"A little."

"Well, he met a young lady down at his brother's place only last Easter, and arrangements are already made for their marriage."

"Papa will not part with me."

"That fixed idea of yours, Margaret, is nothing more than an illusion. Your father, of all men, is not one to fly in the face of scriptural commands. It would be—what's the word that clergymen so dread? Simony?"

"How very ridiculous you are this morning!" interrupted Miss Channing. "Simony!"

"Sacrilege, then. He knows it is written that a man and wife are to leave father and mother, and cleave to each other. Does he want you to stay with him until you are forty?"

"And besides——"

"Besides what?" he inquired, when Miss Channing stopped.

"I cannot talk about it now. You had better say farewell, Adam. They will soon be out of church."

He shook hands, as a preliminary to departure; but, lover-like, lingered on. Lingered until Dr. Channing appeared. A short, fair, portly, clerical-looking divine: in face very unlike his daughter.

"Ah, Mr. Grainger, how d'ye do? I saw you in your place as usual. Hope Mrs. Grainger's quite well. It is too far for her to come? And a long way for you, every Sunday morning. I am truly happy to find a young man so earnest and regular in his attendance at a church where his mind can receive the benefit of sound doctrine."

An ingenuous flush dyed Mr. Grainger's countenance. But he was unable to reject the compliment. He could not tell the self-satisfied doctor that the attraction lay neither in the church nor the orthodox sermons, but in the pretty face of the preacher's daughter.

It was only within a year that Dr. Channing had preached in London, drawing fashion to his fashionable chapel. Previously to that, his ministry had lain in the country, as Rector of Ashton-cum-Creep-ham. A fairly profitable living, that, but nothing to the income he was gaining now. His only child, Margaret, had formed a school friendship with Isabel Grainger, more deep and lasting than school friendships generally are. Highly respectable people were the Graingers; Mr. Grainger, the father, holding a valuable appointment in a wealthy metropolitan insurance-office. They lived in the neighbourhood of London, in rather more style than the Channings lived—than the Channings did live, then, at Ashton

Rectory—and the families, through the young ladies, became intimate.

It was thus that Miss Channing met with Isabel's only brother, Adam. He was in the office with his father, sufficiently high-spirited and handsome for any girl to fall in love with—though, as Isabel used to say, he was remarkably fond of having his own way. Some two years after leaving school, a lingering illness attacked Isabel Grainger. The symptoms, trifling at first, grew serious; from serious they became hopeless. During the progress of this illness, the Channings removed to London, Dr. Channing having given up his Rectory for a West End chapel. Margaret, who had recently lost her mother, was allowed to spend a good portion of time with her friend; and it was round Isabel's death-bed that the liking, which had arisen between Margaret and Adam, grew into love. Since then, other changes had taken place. Mr. Grainger had died; Adam had succeeded to his post in the insurance-office, and to a salary of eight hundred a-year. Mr. Grainger had received considerably more; as Adam no doubt would receive in time. But he thought he could marry very well upon this.

But Dr. and Miss Channing had not become denizens of town, and of Eaton-place, for nothing. They were grand people now, living amongst the grand; and

they had, perhaps insensibly, acquired exalted ideas. Margaret's ambition and Margaret's heart were at variance. Love prompted her to accept Adam Grainger; ambition said, Tush! he is nobody; *I* may aspire to a higher sphere. And it is possible these ideas may, in a degree, have tended to deaden her love, if not to weaken it.

On the Monday morning, following the Sunday just noticed, Miss Channing went out, and did not return until luncheon time. It was waiting in the dining-room. She laid aside her bonnet, sat down before the tray, and began. Her father was frequently not in at that meal; at any rate, it was his desire that he should never be waited for. Something that she wanted was not on the table, and she rang for it.

"Papa is out, I suppose?" she carelessly observed to the man.

"No, miss, the doctor is in his study. Mr. Grainger is with him."

Mr. Grainger! All Margaret's appetite left her on the instant. She laid down her knife and fork, and rose in agitation. "To bring matters to an issue so very soon!" was her resentful thought.

A few minutes, and Margaret heard him leave the house. Her father came into the dining-room. Dr. Channing was a passionless man, rarely giving way

to emotion of any kind, saving in the pulpit. He was apt to grow excited then; but in ordinary life his exterior was becomingly calm. He sat down, took some fowl on his plate, and requested his daughter to cut him a slice of ham.

She proceeded to do so, her heart beating violently, and scarcely conscious of what she was about.

"Margaret!" exclaimed the doctor, after an interval. She looked up.

"Are you expecting visitors?"

"No, papa. Why?"

"You are cutting enough ham for half-a-dozen people. Do you wish me to eat all that?"

She blushed violently at the mistake she had made, and pushed the superfluous slices out of sight underneath the joint. She then rose and stood at the window, looking out, but seeing nothing. Dr. Channing ate on placidly until he had finished.

The suspense was choking her. If Adam Grainger had been asking for her, she must either refuse or accept him: if the latter, why, all her glowing dreams of ambition would fly away; if the former, life would become a blank she scarcely dared contemplate. Apparently her father was not going to speak. The tray was gone down now, and he had taken up a book. Margaret was a straightforward girl; she liked to know the worst of things; it was better to

bear than uncertainty. If her father did not speak presently, she would.

"Papa—was not that Mr. Grainger who went out?"

"It was. Mr. Grainger is not the only visitor I have had this morning," added Dr. Channing, looking at Margaret's back, for her face was turned away. "Colonel Hoare has been here."

More perplexity for Margaret. Colonel the Honourable Gregory Hoare was the father of Captain Hoare; and Captain Hoare was the most inveterate admirer she had, next to Mr. Grainger. A suspicion had more than once crossed Margaret's mind that he was the man for whom she should sometime discard Adam Grainger.

"Come, Margaret, it is of no use beating about the bush," said Dr. Channing. "Did you know of these visits? Let us begin with Mr. Grainger's. Were you aware of the purport of his?"

"Not exactly."

"That is no answer. Did you send Adam Grainger to me with a demand that I should allow you to become his wife?"

"No," said Margaret, rather faintly.

"I thought not. I informed him that he must be labouring under a mistake. He said there was an attachment between you, and that it had existed for some time."

Following her out almost immediately, came a tall, gentlemanly, but young man, whose bright hazel eyes were pleasant to look upon. He advanced to the carriage-door, and shook hands with her.

"You are not staying to-day, Margaret! Are you ill? I saw you hasten out."

"I felt too ill to stay," was Miss Channing's answer; whilst a rosy blush, which had stolen to her face at sound of his voice, began rapidly to fade. "I suppose it is the heat."

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An amused expression shone in his handsome eyes.

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"Oh, but, I mean—another sort of seriousness. You know what I mean. Adam, I shall never make you religious."

"Yes, you shall, Margaret: when you have the right to make me what you please."

"How did you like papa's sermon to-day?" she inquired hastily.

"Very much, of course."

"That portion of it about David and Saul?"

"I did not notice that," he was obliged to confess. "I do believe, Margaret, I was thinking more of you than of the sermon."

"Oh, Adam! that is so bad a habit—letting the thoughts wander in church! But it may be overcome."

"Yes, yes: I mean to overcome it, and everything else that you disapprove. Margaret, I have made up my mind to risk our chance. I shall speak to Dr. Channing."

She looked startled. "If you do, I will never speak to you again. We must wait."

"Wait—wait! That has been the burden of your song for months, Margaret. But I am growing tired of waiting. I assure you I have been in a desperate humour all this last week. Other men who are

"Did he—for Captain Hoare—make me an offer of marriage?" rejoined Margaret, in a low tone, evading the question and asking another.

"It was coming to it, as I believe, when that young Grainger interrupted us. Spilson must needs usher him into the same room! Marplot! The next time Spilson does anything so stupid he may take his wages. Up jumped the colonel, and said he would call later."

A pause.

"I should like Captain Hoare to be my son-in-law, Margaret. There's not a better family in England than that of the Hoares; and the mother, Lady Sophia, looks a charming woman. *That* will be a desirable connection, if you like!"

So Margaret thought. Vain ambition rose in her heart, over-shadowing, for the moment, all unpleasant regrets.

"We appointed half-past three this afternoon, therefore Colonel Hoare will be here then. The conference is to relate to money and settlements. It would be proper, he observed, for some agreement to be come to upon that score before matters went on farther."

"Papa," asked Margaret, "had Mr. Grainger been in the position of Captain Hoare, possessing wealth and family, would you have objected to him?"

"No. I like the young man exceedingly. But your

interests must be considered. Where was the use of your asking that?"

Indeed where! It was only a sudden thought.

"And I may accept Captain Hoare for you?"

"Yes," concluded Margaret, with a sigh.

Friends called to take Miss Channing for a drive. It was late when she returned; and then her father, as she expected, had gone out to dine with a brother clergyman. She was anxious to know what arrangements had been concluded with Colonel Hoare. She pictured herself the future bride of his distinguished son, she held her head an inch higher as she dwelt upon it, and she kept repeating to herself that she *would* like him, she *would* forget Adam Grainger.

Easier said than done, Miss Channing.

CHAPTER II.

LOST.

MARGARET CHANNING dined alone, and then went up to dress, for she was engaged to an evening party, where she would be, later, joined by her father. Captain Hoare was to be there too, so it behoved her to look her best. And she did so.

Entering the dining-room, as she descended, Mr.

Grainger confronted her in her white silk and pearls. She started back, half confounded at his appearance.

Though her heart, true to itself, beat with pleasure, her conscience dreaded the interview; and could he or she have vanished into air, after the fashion of an apparition, it had been welcome to Miss Channing.

"Margaret," he exclaimed, seizing her hand, "I have waited here a whole half-hour. It has seemed to me like a day."

"I did not expect you," she faltered.

"You must have expected me," was his impatient rejoinder. "Margaret! the answer your father gave me this morning was not *your* answer!"

"How can I go against my father?"

"The question was not mooted of whether I should call you wife," he continued, more and more impetuously: "we did not get so far. That—if you will—must come later. But Dr. Channing said there was no attachment between us—said it, as I understood, from you. What does that mean?"

"Not from me," she replied, in a timid tone; "I had not then spoken with him. But, Adam, my father says that what has been between us must be so no longer."

"Do you dare to tell me to my face that our long love is wasted? A thing to be forgotten from henceforth?—thrown away as worthless?"

"You terrify me," she said, bursting into tears of confusion and perplexity.

"Margaret, my love," he whispered, changing his angry tone for one of sweet tenderness, "'terrify' is a strange word for you to use to me. Perhaps we are mistaking each other. Will you give me leave to ask for you of your father?"

She hesitated. Her deep love shone out prominently before her; her heart told her that her life's happiness was bound up in him: should she wilfully throw this love, this happiness, away for ever? It was a heavy responsibility to be decided in that hurried moment. A conviction lay within her, that if *she* wished to marry Adam Grainger, her father would not hold out against it: for she was very dear to him. But, in their turn, arose other visions: of the pomp and pride of the world, of the lust and luxury of high life: all very attractive vanities, and in which she would revel to the full, should she become the envied daughter-in-law of the Honourable Colonel and Lady Sophia Hoare. Her resolve was taken: and she steeled her heart to him who stood there.

"Margaret," he panted, reading her countenance, "what is it that has come between us? To you I will not repeat what Dr. Channing said—and I have thought, since, that I may have mistaken him when he seemed to insinuate that I was not your equal.

Surely you cannot doubt my ability to afford you a suitable home ? ”

“ Adam—I fear—there is no help for it.”

“ No help for what ? ”

“ That we must part.”

He folded his arms and looked at her, breathing heavily. “ It appears that I must be also mistaking *you*. Say that again.”

“ I am very sorry, Adam. I shall always think of you with regret. I hope—— ”

“ Stay, Margaret ! Do not let us bandy compliments in a moment like this. Give me an unvarnished answer. Is it your wish that we should part, and become as strangers ? ”

“ The wish is urged by necessity,” she murmured. “ Not by choice.”

“ What necessity ? ”

“ My father’s will and pleasure. He says—he does say, Adam—that I must marry in a higher sphere of life.”

“ We will not speak now of your father’s will and pleasure. Is it your will and pleasure that I should ask for you ? ”

“ No,” she was obliged to reply ; “ it is too late. It must not be.”

He snapped at the words “ too late,” chafing with passion. “ Too late ! In what way is it too late ? Are you promised to another ? ”



A desperate resolution came over her—that she would tell him the truth. It would serve to put an end to this scene, now becoming more and more painful.

“I believe I am,” she answered, scarcely above a whisper.

A sudden paleness overspread his heated face, and he drew his hand across his brow. Heavy drops of emotion had gathered there.

“God forgive you!” he breathed. “As truly as that you are a false woman, Margaret Channing, you will live to repent this.”

“I hope that—after awhile—you will forgive me. I hope when our feelings—yes, *ours*—have softened down, that we shall renew our friendship. Why should we not? It would be valuable to have you for a friend through life.”

“Who is it?” he rejoined, with unnatural calmness.

“Captain Hoare. But, oh, Adam!” she added, with a burst of irrepressible feeling that ought to have been kept in, and she laid her hand upon his arm, as in the days of their affection, “do not think I love him! In one sense I am not false to you; for I can never love him, or any one else, as I have loved you. The marriage is suitable, and I have acceded to it from worldly motives. It will take me years—it will

—even of my married life—to forget you. Give me your forgiveness now, before we part.”

For answer, Mr. Grainger cast upon her a look of contempt, shook her hand from his arm, and passed out at the door.

She sank down on a chair and gave vent to a passionate burst of tears: loud, heavy cries, such as one hears from a child. Now that it was done, she would have given the whole world to recall him; she thought her heart was breaking. She took no heed of the minutes as they passed; those sobs only grew more hysterical. When she became calmer, she dragged herself upstairs, shut herself into her room, and proceeded to bathe her eyes and obliterate the signs of her emotion. Then she descended to the carriage, which had long waited for her and was conveyed to her destination.

With the lighted candles, the music, and the gay crowd she was soon mixing in, Margaret's spirits revived. “*I will* strive—I will thrust regret and care from me,” she murmured; “the anguish will not be so great if I make a resolute effort against it. How late Captain Hoare is!”

If Margaret had but known what was detaining him!

Captain Hoare dined that day with some young men at his club, and only went home afterwards to

dress. His father and mother were sitting alone; the colonel over his wine.

"What's the news?" cried the captain, as he sat down. "No, thank you: it is too hot for port. I don't mind a glass of claret."

He had asked the question in a listless sort of manner, as if not very much caring whether he received an answer or not. Consequently he was scarcely prepared for the sharp way in which his mother, arousing herself from her after-dinner drowsiness, took him up.

"The news is this, sir: that you ought to have inquired further, before despatching your father on a fool's errand. Twice he went!"

"A fool's errand!" echoed the gallant captain.

"A fruitless one," interposed the colonel. "We were much against the match in every way, Edward, as you know; for the Channings are not people of sufficient family to mate with us; but——"

"It was derogatory even to think of it," interrupted Lady Sophia. "I strove to impress that upon you, colonel, before you went."

"My dear—Edward was so bent upon it: and I thought there might be mitigating circumstances. If the girl had had twenty or thirty thousand pounds down with her, as was reported, one might have put up with it. However, all's well that ends well.

Channing refuses to give her any money until his death, so the matter is at an end."

"Why does he refuse?" asked the captain, with a very blank look.

"He told me he should give her none before he died," replied the colonel; "and that what there would be for her afterwards, the precise amount, he really could not state. And he proceeded to ask me, in a tone of resentment, if I had come there to make a *barter* for his daughter."

"I hope this will cure you of looking for a wife in an inferior family, son Edward," observed Lady Sophia. "Your brothers have both married women of title—and I am sick and tired of advising you to do the same. It would not have been convenient to them to receive Miss Channing as a sister-in-law. Who are these Channings? Nobody. He was nothing but an obscure country parson. It is only since he got this chapel that even their name has been heard of."

"But Miss Channing will surely have money, sir," remonstrated Captain Hoare, passing over his mother's remarks without comment.

"I don't know whether she will or not," was Colonel Hoare's reply. "The doctor's words sounded to me anything but satisfactory; shuffling, in fact. You cannot marry her upon the uncertainty, Edward. I

should never give my consent. My only inducement to do so lay in the understanding that she might bring you a large fortune. You must give her up."

"Well—if there's no help for it. I don't feel inclined to marry the best girl that ever stepped, unless she can bring grist to the mill."

"There is plenty of time for you to think of marrying," cried Lady Sophia. "I cannot imagine what put such a thing into your head. Pray forget this nonsensical episode of romance, Edward."

"I suppose I must," thought the young officer. "But she was a deuced nice girl; and I took it for granted the old parson could and would give her a pile of gold."

So, little wonder Captain Hoare was late. When he entered the ball-room, the evening was far advanced. Miss Channing was waltzing in exuberant spirits—so far as anything appeared to the contrary. He came up to her when she was free. She was standing in the recess of the bow window, which opened upon a small terrace filled with exotics—a London apology for a garden. At the moment, no one was there but herself, so they were comparatively alone. Captain Hoare took her hand in silence.

"I thought you told me you should be here early?" she remarked.

"I did mean to be. But—as things have turned

out—I doubted whether I ought to appear at all, and lost time deliberating. Then an irresistible impulse seized on me to come and bid you a last farewell. And why not? Nobody here knows what has passed, or will be the wiser.”

Had he spoken in Hebrew, his words could not have been much more unintelligible to Miss Channing. “Bid me farewell!” she repeated. “I do not understand. Is your regiment ordered abroad?”

Neither did Captain Hoare understand just then. “Perhaps you have not seen Dr. Channing?” he exclaimed, after a pause, as a sudden idea occurred to him.

“I have not seen papa since the middle of the day.”

“You are not ignorant, dear Miss Channing, that I had set my heart and hopes upon you,” he rejoined, gently retaining her hand, and lowering his voice to a whisper. “I do not think you could have mistaken my sentiments, although they were only implied.”

Her blushing cheek and downcast eye told him that she had not.

“And now to have these delightful dreams knocked on the head by two crabbed old fathers is almost more than mortal ought to stand. I can only hope you will not feel it as I do.”

A cold shiver of dismay ran through the heart of Margaret Channing.

"I am not quite sure what it is you mean," she faltered.

"What a blessing it would be if there were no such thing as money in the world!" ejaculated the captain. "My father called on Dr. Channing this afternoon to open negotiations, and the two must get differing about the base-metal part of the transaction. So he came home, laid his embargo on me, and ordered me to consign you to the regions of forgetfulness. You will, no doubt, receive the same command, as to me, from Dr. Channing. The unnaturally hard stuff that fathers are made of!"

She could not entirely prevent the expression of her wounded feelings from struggling to her face. Captain Hoare saw its paleness, and spoke with more feeling than he had hitherto displayed. In fact, he had treated the matter carelessly as a relief to his own embarrassment.

"Dear Miss Channing, I am deeply sorry for this termination to our valued friendship. I should have been proud and happy to call you my wife; that I may not do so is, believe me, no fault of mine. We may not act against circumstances; but I shall regret this day to the last hour of my life. And now I will say farewell: it is painful to me to linger here, as it must be painful to you."

He wrung her hand, and quitted the rooms; and

Margaret Channing's spirit sank within her. Confused visions of the true heart she had thrown away *for nothing* rose before her in bitter mockery. One came up and claimed her for the dance: she did not know what she answered, excepting that it was an abrupt refusal. She sank down in a sort of apathy: and presently she discerned her father making his way towards her.

"I suppose you are not ready to go home, Margaret?"

"Oh yes, I am, papa. My head aches with the heat, as it did yesterday in church. I shall be glad to go."

"Then say good-night to Mrs. Goldingham, and come."

"Thankfully," she muttered to herself. "Anything to be alone."

Until they were nearly home Dr. Channing was silent, leaning back in his corner of the carriage. The house was in sight when he raised himself to speak.

"A pretty sort of high-and-mighty fellow that Colonel Hoare is! Do you know what he wanted?"

"No," was Margaret's answer.

"Wanted me to undertake to give you twenty thousand pounds down on your wedding-day, condescendingly intimating that it might be settled upon

you. I told him I should not do it; that what money would come to you would come at my death, and not before."

"And then?" repeated Margaret, in a low, apathetical sort of voice—"what did he say then?"

"Then he stiffly rose, said the proposal he had hoped to make on behalf of his son must remain unmade, and so marched out. They are a proud, stuck-up set, Margaret: we are better off without them."

"Yes. Perhaps we are."

"You do not regret it, child?" he added, a shade of anxiety visible in his voice.

"Papa, I do not regret Captain Hoare. I do not really care for him."

CHAPTER III.

REGRETS.

It was a foggy day in November, sixteen or seventeen months subsequent to the above events. The dusk of evening was drawing on, and Margaret Channing sat in front of a large fire, her eyes fixed dreamily on the red coals. What did she see in them? Was she tracing out the fatal mistake she

had made? She had been a sadder and a wiser girl since then.

Never but once since had she seen Adam Grainger; and that was at the house of a mutual friend. He had addressed her in a more freezingly polite tone than he would have used to greet a stranger, and in a few minutes quitted the house, although he had gone to it with the intention of staying for the evening. It is probable he was aware that money matters had been the stumbling-block to her proposed union with Captain Hoare, since the facts had become known at the time. Margaret despised herself thoroughly for the despicable part she had played. She was endowed with sound sense and good feeling, and she now believed that a species of mania must have come over her. But she had reaped her punishment: for her heart's sunshine had gone out with Adam Grainger.

A circumstance had this day caused her mind to revert more particularly to the past: the announcement in the public papers of the marriage of Captain Hoare. He had wedded a high-born lady, one of his own order. Strange to say, Miss Channing had not received any offers of marriage since that prodigal day which had brought her two; strange, because she was a handsome and popular girl, occupying a good position, and was looked upon as sure to inherit a fortune.

The neglect caused her no regret; and it is a question whether she would have said "Yes," had marriage been offered her. Thought and experience had come to Margaret Channing, and she knew, now, that something besides wealth and grandeur was necessary to constitute the happiness of married life. She had learnt, also, to be less fond of gaiety than formerly; she had become awake to the startling truth that life cannot be made up of pleasure and self-indulgence; that it has earnest duties which call imperatively for fulfilment. So Margaret sat over the fire this evening in her usual reflective, but not thankless or repining mood; if the last year or two could come over again, how differently would she act!

She was interrupted by the entrance of her father. He drew an easy-chair close to the fire and sat down, shivering.

"Margaret, I wish you would write a note for me. I cannot go out this evening, as I promised. Write and say so. I don't feel well; and it is so cold to-day!"

"Dear papa!" exclaimed Margaret, in surprise. "It is quite warm: a muggy, close day. I was thinking how uncomfortable this great fire made the room."

"I tell you, child, it is cold; wretchedly cold. Or else I have caught cold and feel it so. What have you rung for?"

"For lights, papa. I cannot see to write."

"Don't have them yet. I cannot bear them: my head and eyes are aching. There's no hurry about the note for this hour to come."

Margaret sat down again. Dr. Channing was leaning back in the chair, his hands falling in a listless attitude, and his eyes closed. She gently touched one of the hands. It was burning with fever.

"Papa! I fear indeed you have taken cold. Let me send for Mr. Williams."

"Now, there you go, Margaret, jumping to extremes," was the peevish rejoinder. "What do I want with a doctor? If I take some gruel and go to bed early, I shall be all right in the morning."

Dr. Channing was not "all right" in the morning. He was worse, and unable to rise. His daughter, without asking this time, sent for Mr. Williams. Before two days had elapsed, Mr. Williams brought a physician: and the physician brought another. Dr. Channing was in imminent danger.

Margaret scarcely left his bedside. Though she would not allow herself to fear. Hope was strong within her.

It proved to be a delusive hope. In little more than a week Dr. Channing was dead. And he had died without a last farewell: since the third

day of his illness he had not recognized even Margaret.

Margaret had borne up bravely, but now she was utterly cast down: more so than many of weaker mind might have been. It was so sudden. A fortnight, nay, ten days ago, he was full of health and life; and now, stretched there! Her senses could scarcely grasp the appalling fact that it was a reality.

She had no relatives, no near and dear friends to turn to for comfort in her sorrow. Many carriages came driving to the door with ceremonious cards and condolences; but *these* are no solace to the stricken heart. In one respect it was well for Margaret that she was alone. Had there been any one to act for her, she would have lain down unresistingly to give way to her grief: as it was, she was compelled to be up and doing. There were so many things to be thought of, so many orders to give.

The funeral must be settled, and Margaret must see the undertaker. She was inexperienced in these matters; but thought, in her honour and affection for him who had gone, that she could not give orders for a too sumptuous procession. It is a very common mistake. Perhaps she was, unconsciously, consulting the wish of the dead. Dr. Channing had so loved pomp. So she gave the orders.

Later in the day, a card was brought up to Mar-

garet. She recognized it as being that of her father's solicitor, Mr. Padmore; to whom it had not occurred to her, in her trouble, to write. But he had heard of the death, and came unsought for. He was almost a stranger to Margaret: she remembered meeting him once or twice at Mrs. Grainger's, two years before.

He inquired what use he could be of; and they proceeded to speak about the funeral. Margaret was mentioning the directions she had given, when he interrupted her, speaking impulsively.

"My dear Miss Channing, have you considered the enormous expense of such a funeral?"

Margaret looked at him; almost scornfully. Her voice, in its emphasis, savoured of indignation.

"No, sir, I have not taken *expense* into consideration."

"But—pardon me—are you sure that you are justified in incurring this outlay of money?"

Her spirits were broken with sorrow, and she burst into tears. "I did not think there was any one unkind enough to suggest that mercenary motives should influence me, when performing the last offices to my dead father."

Mr. Padmore fidgeted on his chair. "You are mistaking me, Miss Channing. But I scarcely like, at the present moment, to speak out plainly."

"Pray say anything you wish," was Margaret's

reply, still savouring of resentment. "Plain speaking is best always; and certainly more consonant to an hour like this."

"Then, my dear young lady, what I meant to ask was, whether you are sure you will have the money to pay for it?"

"What?" uttered Margaret, in strange surprise. "I—beg your pardon; but what do you mean?"

"I fear that Dr. Channing has not died rich. Not, indeed, in easy circumstances."

Margaret thought the lawyer must be dreaming. Dr. Channing not in easy circumstances, when their house was so full of luxury!

But it was that very luxury which had assisted to impoverish Dr. Channing, Mr. Padmore said, when explanations were entered on. Ever since he had resided in town, his rate of living had far exceeded his income, neither had he been quite a free man previously. He had borrowed money at different times; which money was yet unpaid.

Margaret's heart sank within her as she listened. A hasty thought occurred to her.

"There is the insurance money! Papa had insured his life."

"My dear, yes. But there are the debts."

She dropped her head upon her hand. It was a startling communication.

"I did not know that you were wholly unacquainted with these facts," the lawyer continued. "I hope you will not feel that I have spoken wrongly in alluding to them."

"No, no; I thank you; it was right to let me hear this. I—I was under so different an impression. But allow me, Mr. Padmore," she added, with sudden energy—"allow me to know all my position; do not hide anything. Am I to understand that my dear father leaves no money behind him? None?"

"I cannot tell that, yet. If any, it will be very trifling. Nothing like—I am grieved to say it—nothing like a provision for you."

"Oh, I do not think of myself," she said, in a pained, anguished tone. "I am thinking what a weight all this must have been upon his mind."

"Therefore, will it not be well to countermand the orders you have given, and substitute more simple ones? I think of you when I suggest this, Miss Channing."

"It will be well," she replied. "I cannot incur an expense which I may not be able to pay. And after all," she added, giving way to an uncontrollable flood of sorrow, "whether the funeral be grand or simple, what can it matter to my dearest father?"

The more inexpensive funeral took place, and a week or two passed on.

Dr. Channing's affairs turned out to be as Mr. Padmore stated. There was sufficient to pay the debts, and but a very small surplus over that—about a hundred and sixty or seventy pounds. The furniture was disposed of advantageously, standing as it was, to the parties who had taken the house off Margaret's hands, and the carriages and horses were sold at a friendly auction.

What a change it was! "Aujourd'hui roi, demain rien."

CHAPTER IV.

FOUND.

It was the night before Margaret Channing was to quit her home. She had remained in it until the last, superintending and arranging. The books and the plate she had only that day sent away to the place where they were to be sold; and she had packed up her own clothes and effects, ready to be removed with her on the morrow. Altogether she was very tired, and sat down on a low chair before the fire, her head aching. How miserably the new year had come in for her!

She sat looking into the fire—her old habit—tracing

out events in her imagination. Friends, but not many, had pressed invitations upon her at the time of Dr. Channing's death—"Come and stay a week with us;" or "a few days," or "a month," as the case might be. But Margaret said "No" to all. She deemed it best to have no deceitful procrastinations, but to grapple at once with her position. And she had done so, and decided upon her plans. Well educated and accomplished, she resolved to go out as a governess. There would be little difficulty in finding a desirable appointment for the daughter of Dr. Channing.

As she sat there, a remembrance came over her of Captain Hoare—of the position she had once thought to occupy as his wife: how different that romance from this reality! But not half so much did she shrink from this remembrance as she did from another one—her unjustifiable conduct to Adam Grainger. She had thrown away the once dearly coveted hope of being his wife; thrown it away for a chimera which had failed her. Oh! to compare what she might have been with what she was! with her isolated situation, her expected life of labour. Next, her thoughts wandered to her father; and tears came on, and she cried long and bitterly.

A servant, the only one she had retained in the house, came in and aroused her. "A gentleman has

called, ma'am," she said, "and wants to know if he can see you. Here is his card."

Margaret held it to the fire, and strained her dim eyes over it.

"Mr. Grainger."

"What can he want?" she mentally exclaimed. "It must be something about the insurance—— Show the gentleman in here, Mary; and light the lamp."

Adam Grainger shook hands with her as he entered, with more sympathy and tenderness of manner than he might have done, had he not detected the change in her—the once blooming Margaret Channing. Her tearful cheek was wan and pale, and her frame much thinner than formerly; unless the deep black of her mourning attire deceived him. *He* did not look one whit altered; but was the same good-looking, pleasant, gentlemanly man as of yore.

"I beg you to excuse this interruption," he began, when the maid had quitted the room; "I am here at the desire of my mother. She thinks there has been some mistake—that you did not receive the note she wrote to you last week."

"I have not received any note from Mrs. Grainger," replied Margaret, pressing her hand upon her side, for her heart was wildly beating at the presence of one whom she still fondly loved. "Excepting one she kindly wrote to me when papa died."

"Not that; you replied to that, I believe; this one was written on Thursday or Friday last. Its purport, Miss Channing, was to beg the favour of your spending a little time with her when you leave here. I"—he hastened to add—"am no longer living at home. My mother is alone."

The tears rushed into Margaret's eyes.

"Every one is so very kind," she said. "I am much indebted to Mrs. Grainger for thinking of me; but I must decline. Though I will certainly go down and personally thank her. She is no longer able to move out-of-doors, I believe."

"She has not been out for several months past. She wished me to inquire into your plans: though I know not whether you may deem it an impertinence."

"No, no," answered Margaret, scarcely able to prevent the tears falling, so miserably did old recollections, combined with present low spirits, tell upon her that evening. "I feel greatly obliged by Mrs. Grainger's kind interest. Will you tell her that I am going to-morrow to Mr. Padmore's for a week or two; he and Mrs. Padmore would have it so. By the end of that time I hope to have found a permanent home. Friends are already looking out for me, and an advertisement is being drawn up for the *Times*. I must turn my abilities to account now."

"But it is not well that you should do so," he

rejoined, with some agitation of manner—"it is not right for Dr. Channing's daughter. We heard of your determination from Mr. Padmore, and it grieved and vexed my mother. She would be so delighted, Miss Channing, if you would, at any rate for the present, make your home with her."

Margaret did not answer. She was struggling to suppress her rebellious feelings.

"If you would but put up with her ailments, she says, and be free and gay as in your own home, she would be more happy than she has been since the death of Isabel. Allow me to urge the petition also, Miss Channing."

Margaret shook her head; but the tears dropped forth uncontrolled, and she covered her face with her hands. What was it in her manner that set his heart beating? Adam Grainger advanced; he drew her hands away; he bent over her with a whisper.

"Margaret! I would rather urge a prayer of my own. That you would come—after a while—to *my* home."

She rose up, trembling. What did he mean?

"Has the proper time come for me to ask you once again to be my wife? Oh! let me hope it has! Margaret, dearest Margaret! it was in this room you rejected me: let it be in this room that you atone for the pain it brought."

"I can never atone for it," she replied, with a burst of anguish. "Do not waste words upon me, Mr. Grainger; I am not worth it."


"The atonement lies ready to your hand, Margaret. You can let my home be your home, my name your name; you can join with me in forgetting this long estrangement, and promise to be my dearest wife. I will accept all that as your atonement."

"But I do not deserve this," she sobbed. "I deserve only your contempt and hatred."

"Hush, hush, Margaret! You shall take my love instead—if you will treasure now what you once flung away."

"Indeed I do not deserve your love," she murmured. "Adam! it is too great reward for me."

"Is it?" he answered, as he wound his arms round her. "It shall be yours, Margaret, for ever and for ever."



PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

SICKNESS.

ON a comfortable sofa by the side of a large fire in a spacious London drawing-room, lay a lady, young and handsome. Not, however, in the extreme of youth, or in girlhood, for she had been a wife and mother some years, and was approaching towards eight or nine and twenty. Her face was deathly to look upon. Not a shade of colouring appeared in its features, even in the lips; and the eyes were not like eyes, but like two lumps of lead set in there. She had recently passed through a perilous illness; and though so far recovered as to be in the drawing-room, it could not be said she was out of danger. Excessive debility, continued inward fever, and a cough that could not be got rid of, struggled with each other now, and kept her down. She was lying with her eyes closed; awake, but in a sort of unresisted stupor: she for the

most part lay so all day long, and had done so for the last ten weeks. One, drawing near, could have heard her laboured breathing, rendering her sentences, when she did speak, abrupt and broken. It was Margaret, the wife of Adam Grainger.

The room-door opened, and a lad of six came in; too boisterously—but how impart thoughtfulness to young children? He had his mother's handsome features, her expressive dark brown eyes, and her naturally bright complexion. She slowly opened her eyes.

"I want to say good-bye to you, mamma. Sophy was going to take me without, but I ran away from her."


"And have woke up your ma, like the obstinate boy that you are!" broke in Sophy. "I wonder, ma'am, you don't forbid his coming in, unless you please to ring for him."

"I thought you were already at school, Algernon," she panted. "Is it not late?"

"Half-past two," said Sophy.

It was on the stroke of three: but the servants had sat gossiping over their dinner, and Sophy did not hurry herself to move. She thought her mistress, lying there, would not know whether it was late or early. The child drew near to kiss her.

"Algernon, darling, be a good boy. Sophy, did you ask Mrs. Smith this morning how she was?"



"No, ma'am, I didn't think of it. She looked as usual."

Mrs. Smith was Algernon's governess. She kept a day-school close by. She was not strong, often complained of feeling ill, and Mrs. Grainger had fallen into the habit of asking Sophy how the governess was.

They left the room, and Mrs. Grainger relapsed into stillness. But, thought came across her, troubling her mind, as it often did; though she made no outward sign.

Should she live? Or would this illness consign her to the grave? She could not bear to think of it: though her great weakness caused her to feel all anxiety, even this, less poignantly than would any one in health. She could not bear to think of leaving her children; she could not bear to think that another might ever usurp her place with her husband; be *his* wife, and their second mother. And yet—unless she speedily grew better——

The room-door opened again, and the same child entered. Sophy also.

"Mrs. Smith's very poorly, ma'am. Her head is that bad she feels it impossible to keep school this afternoon, so she has sent them all back again."

"How tiresome!" feebly uttered Mrs. Grainger.

"She desired her respects to you, ma'am, and she hoped you would excuse it for once, but that indeed she was too ill to bear their noise."

"Well, well; children *are* troublesome, and they seem more so when one is ill. Take him into the nursery, Sophy, and help nurse to amuse them. Algie, dear child, I am not well enough to have you here."

The boy bounded off, full of life and spirits, intending to play with, or tease, his sister Isabel: and, what with thinking, dozing, and restlessly turning, the invalid got through another hour or two. The servants came in now and then, to see to the fire, or to urge refreshment on their mistress; and the next interruption was from Mr. Grainger.

He was as remarkably good-looking as of yore, full of spirits as his little son; and he came in with a merry smile on his face, and a cheering word. No words but cheering ones were ever heard from him. He edged himself on to the sofa, and leaning over his wife, kissed her repeatedly.

"Adam," she sighed, "I feel so depressed this afternoon! I know I shall never get better."

"You foolish girl! You are a mile-and-a-half better than you were a week ago. And I have brought some news for you."

"Yes?" she languidly answered.

"It's this. I called on Dr. Rice as I came home, and he assured me you were progressing towards recovery as fast as one, so ill as you have been, can

progress. And he has engaged us to go there to dinner this day month, for he knows you will be ready for it."

"How stupid he is!"

"You will not say so when you find him right. You have not had the baby in worrying you?—or Algernon?"

"No; not any of them."

"That's right! Did cook get you the oysters and do them nicely?"

"She got them, but it was of no use. I cannot eat."

"But you must eat, Margaret," he answered, in a more serious tone. "It is of no good going on, day after day, saying you cannot eat; you must eat."

"How can I? Everything I swallow is like dry chips in my throat. If my appetite should ever come back——"

"If! Now, Margaret, how can you talk so? It is coming back already. In a week's time from this you will be asking for mutton chops and port wine all day."

She made no reply. Only sighed and got possession of his hand, lying with it pressed close to her, her eyes closed. He gazed at her in silence; and, now that she was not looking, the hopeful expression faded from his own face. He *knew* she was in a precarious state.

"George Little has got into a splendid thing," he said, presently.

"Has he?"

"Some mines in Cornwall. He and some more fellows are going to work them. I expect, when the thing's regularly afoot, Little will be netting his thousands a-year. It is astonishing to hear his account of the wealth opening to them. I have half a mind to drop my spare cash into it."

"Nonsense, Adam!"

"Of course I must hear more about it first, and be sure. I am going out after dinner to meet Little, and look at his plans and papers."

"You will not stay late?" she said, anxiously. "I get so dull in an evening."

"No fear, Margaret. I shall be back by eight o'clock. But don't you sit up till that time."

Mr. Grainger's getting back at eight o'clock proved to be ten. His brain was whirling with the grand project for making wealth, just unfolded to him by his friend Little, as connected with those wonderful Cornish mines, the Great Trebeddon. He forgot all, however, when he found his wife still in the drawing-room. He inquired, almost angrily, how she could be so imprudent.

"I waited for you," she said, scarcely able, now, to speak from exhaustion. "And I have too much bed."



Up from it late, and going to it early! It makes me weak. I know it does. To-morrow I shall get up to breakfast."

"Margaret How can you speak so foolishly?"

"I shall. I shall get up, and try it."

"Very well," he cheerfully said. He would not contest the point: she was in no state for it then.

And the following morning Mrs. Grainger did get up. Not to breakfast, but directly after it. By ten o'clock she was in the drawing-room. Standing for a moment at the window, and looking out on the gay London street, she saw Sophy cross the road with Algernon in her hand, towards the house of the schoolmistress. It was partly within view, the second house of a side street, at right angles with their own.

"Sad management!" she exclaimed, turning to her sofa. "Ten o'clock, and the child not taken to school! It is a sign I am away from everything."

She lay down; and presently, to her surprise, she heard the voice of Algernon on the stairs, talking to one of the servants. Sophy came in alone.

"What have you brought him back for?" her mistress said, almost sharply.

"If you please, ma'am, Mrs. Smith is dead."

Mrs. Grainger rose up and looked at the girl, really doubting her ears. "What do you say, Sophy?"

"Mrs. Smith is dead."

"Dead!"

"Dead, ma'am. She died in the night. Her husband says it was decline, and that she knew she should not get well, but she bore up to the last to keep the scholars together. I expect they had nothing else to live upon, for he gets no teaching at his foreign languages. He is cut up above a bit, poor man, and says he did not know it was so very near. She was only thirty-one: and he don't look so old."


Mrs. Grainger motioned the gossiping servant to leave the room, and lay back on her sofa. Sharp thought came over her with its adder stings. Dead! And she had murmured in her heart at the child's being returned on their hands for *one* afternoon, fearful of his noise disturbing herself, when this poor lady had toiled and struggled out her life in its midst!

CHAPTER II.

THE GOLDEN ERA.

THE inauguration of George Little's career into the arena of speculation deserves a chapter to itself.

Few people of mature age can forget the year 1845, with its frightful excitement, worse than that of any gambling table, its delusive hopes in the earlier



months, and its end of ruin. It was the year of railway mania. How many railways England projected during its progress, and how many Englishmen expected to make their fortunes by becoming shareholders, can never be told. To say that half the public went mad—mad upon that one subject—would be saying little. How else can we account for men of intellect, of strong sense, of honour, having been drawn, body and soul, into that vortex of raging speculation? It was all very well for adventurers; Jacks of straw, shady rogues who lived by their wits; to plunge into it wholesale. *They* had nothing to lose, neither capital nor character; if they won nothing, they risked nothing; and it was, in truth, the one golden era of their lives. Why! many a man, who dared not show his face in the world, would seize the *Times* newspaper in the morning, read the flourishing announcement of some new projected line, borrow some well-sounding address (ay, and oftentimes a name also), and dash off a letter of request to the directors for shares. When they came to him—as they frequently did come—he sold them and pocketed the golden lucre. Fortunes (so to say) were made in a day. Colossal wealth was realized by the lucky. So, perhaps, it was not, after all, to be wondered at, that men of all classes, high and low, poor and rich, honourable and dishonourable, had a try at the venture.

Peers went in for it. Professional men; doctors, lawyers, clergymen—but let the last word be read in a whisper—could not keep out of it. It was in truth a season of wild excitement, the world (as represented by that one small spot on it, Great Britain) elbowing one another to see who should get rich first.

Amongst others who lost their head was one Dr. Leicester; a physician of probity and repute. His nephew, George Little, who was beginning life under his auspices, became so greatly infected by the popular mania, that he abandoned medicine for the money mart. George was a very young man then; but a year out of his teens: it seemed to him a fine and grand thing to make oceans of money without working for it. So he threw up his medicine books and his lectures and all the rest of the drudgery, and took to writing for railway allotments.

To hear the history Little would relate of that remarkable year, when he was associated with his uncle in money-making, was something ludicrous. He would give it in a semi-sad, semi-humorous tone, convulsing his hearers with laughter. The following is its substance.

In the month of March the ingenious public projectors were hard at work, causing the daily announcements of fresh lines to be in full flow. The madness

had not, perhaps, yet reached its height, but it was travelling fast onwards to it.

On one of the windy days during that month Dr. Leicester's carriage, containing himself and George Little, was rapidly pursuing its way to the City. Slackening its pace near the Exchange, it stopped at Bartholomew Lane; and the doctor and his nephew jumped from it, all impatience.

"What are they out at?" the doctor exclaimed breathlessly, accosting one of those gentlemen known then to the public by the appellation of "stag."

"Which line, sir? There are two out this morning."

"The Great Irish Bog Junction. I have an allotment.

"They are out at four pounds," answered the man; whose name, a somewhat appropriate one, was Fox.

"You may take the letter and sell it for me," continued the doctor. "Five pounds for your trouble, you know."

"How many shares?" demanded Fox, taking the letter in his eager gripe.

"Twenty-five. I wrote for a hundred. What other line is out?"

"The Great Southampton and Dundee Direct."

"Ah! that's a grand enterprise," said Dr. Leicester.

"Grand enterprise!" cried Fox, "I should think it is, too. Capital ten millions, in five hundred thousand

shares of twenty pounds each. Deposit, two guineas per share. Why, the deposits alone, sir, amount to one million and fifty thousand pounds."

"Who is the promoter?"

"I don't know; but what a head he must have! What a spurner of difficulties! There's to be a continuation from Southampton to the Isle of Wight—a bridge over the sea, or a tunnel under it. The Osborne Branch it is to be called. That enterprising man, sir, ought to have his statue carved in gold."

"So he ought," said George, in an ecstasy of admiration.

"They are already casting busts of him in plaster of Paris, to be placed up in the refreshment-rooms all along the line, and on the top of all the lighthouses."

"I hope his pockets are capacious," observed Dr. Leicester; "I suppose he will fill them. Are the shares at a premium?"

"*Premium!*" returned Fox, amazed at the superfluous question. "Five-and-a-half before they were out, sir. Can't get them now for love or money."

"I shall make a point of writing to every line that's advertised," mused the doctor, aloud, as he paced up and down while waiting for the return of Fox. "It is like picking up gold in a mine. What a fortune may be made at it!"

"Will be made, uncle," corrected George.

"Not," resumed the doctor, "that I shall continue to apply for shares, and then sell the letter: there is something to my mind extremely dishonourable in it, though hundreds do it every day. Well, what luck?" he cried, pushing through the crowd, as he caught sight of Fox's hat and the top of his head in Capel Court.

The answer was a roll of bank-notes and a heap of gold—considerably more than a hundred pounds in all—put into his hand by Fox. And for which he had given nothing but a simple letter, which had come to him by the post that morning.

"Sign the deeds on the twenty-second, sir," observed Fox.

"All right, and thank you," answered Dr. Leicester, making a note of the date, after giving a five-pound note to Fox, and pocketing the rest of his gains. George felt that he was walking in a gold mine, which must have been opened for his especial benefit.

But there was one person connected with them who could not understand this rapid money-making—could not be convinced of its security; and that was Mrs. Leicester.

"It is a speculation, make of it the best you will," she said that day to her husband. "It cannot be anything else."

"Thousands are being realized by it," returned the

doctor. "This is a golden era, and I feel that I ought to take advantage of it in justice to my children, and make hay while the sun shines."

"But if thousands are being realized by some people, the same thousands are being lost by others," argued Mrs. Leicester.

"You do not understand it, my dear. No one loses."

"Then where does all the money come from?—this, for instance," asked Mrs. Leicester, turning about the notes and gold her husband showed her as his gains that morning. "There must be a sort of perpetual fountain, like that possessed by the girl in the fairy-tale, who rained out of her mouth pearls and diamonds."

"But, aunt, *everybody's* winning," put in George. "Everybody, that is, who is fortunate enough to get a letter of allotment."

"Well, George, I cannot, as I say, understand it," she replied. "Only, I am sure there must be a magic well somewhere perpetually throwing up gold, if nobody loses."

Many a wife said in that year the same thing.

"So *you* have been bitten!" cried a well-known surgeon to Dr. Leicester, when the doctor's speculations became pretty generally known.

"Bitten!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Bitten," repeated Sir Benjamin, "bitten by the Ironphobia. I look upon this false excitement as a

mania; and—mark me!—its end for numbers will be madness. Recollect the South Sea bubble.”

“Oh, this is a very different affair,” returned Dr. Leicester. “That was a speculation, distant and unknown; this is tangible.”

And now, the greater portion of Dr. Leicester’s time was devoted to railway business. The whole of his nephew’s was. From the first hour in the morning to the last at night, their thoughts ran upon shares. They wrote, each—George Little giving a different address—for allotments to nearly all the announced schemes; and obtained, perhaps, shares from one line in ten. This did not satisfy the doctor, so he purchased, at heavy premiums, in some of what were considered the best lines.

George would have done the same, but for lack of capital. He sold most of his letters of allotment, realizing money at once. The doctor did not continue to pursue that dishonourable practice, but eagerly paid the deposits upon all. He was an enormous holder of scrip, and his wealth—in prospective—was proportionably great. His savings, since he commenced practice, had been carefully husbanded: they were about six thousand pounds, and were invested in the funds; but this money was now withdrawn and sunk in “scrip”

The Great Southampton and Dundee Direct had

gone up surprisingly and especially. Its patronizers said it was safe to continue going up, up, up, to the end, and never come down again—something like smoke. All the world made a rush for its shares. Dr. Leicester, following in the stream, of course bought up all he could lay his hands upon ; or, to speak more strictly, all he could muster up money to pay for.

But it was in August that the greatest scheme of all came out. The "Grand Atmospheric Moon and Middlesex Line,"* with a branch (projected) to the tail of the new comet—which, you may all remember, appeared that year. The grand terminus was to be in Trafalgar Square, Charing Cross ; offices were in Moorgate Street. A very remarkable man, indeed, was the projector of this. The originator of the Great Southampton and Dundee Direct was thought aspiring at the time, but he was nothing to the moon man. The public had never met with so extensive a benefactor. Dinners were given him, speeches made of him, pieces of plate showered down upon him, and a hundred other favours.

Only to read the prospectus was enough to make the heart glow. The printer could not get sufficient struck off to satisfy the demand, though he never saw

* Mr. George Little was supposed to allude, under this heading, to a very difficult and important line (could it have been carried out), which some wonderful man had the audacity to project, and which came to a signal failure.

bed for a week. Capital, £100,000,000, the whole of which was ready to be paid-in beforehand by the eager applicants. Surveyors in balloons were already up, looking after the practicabilities of the undertaking, and their reports were most favourable. It was conjectured that, of all the lines yet proposed, this would be the most flourishing. And the directorship—what a strong one it was! The like had not been seen before in any previous announcement: five dukes seven marquises, eleven earls, thirteen barons, and a bishop! Not to speak of well-known, staid city men.

Never was such excitement known in the city as the day the allotments were expected to come out. Moorgate Street was impassable; and carriages, to say nothing of foot-passengers, had to go a mile round. Very gentlemanly men in black coats, sky-blue waistcoats, and ponderous gold chains half as large as the sheriffs', were stationed at the offices to tell the agitated expectants how the work went on. They would have been at the door, but it had to be barred and bolted to keep out the crowd. So they leaned out of the first-floor windows; the blue of the vests and yellow glitter of the chains producing an extremely beautiful contrast of colouring to the admiring eyes of the gaping throng below; whom they from time to time addressed, by way of keeping down the excitement.

"All right, gentlemen—a little patience. Our secretary has got as far as the W's, and he is signing away at steam speed. An hour or so will finish the job. There are only the Y's and Z's; X's don't count, you know. We have clerks in abundance: thirty folding, sixty sealing, and ninety directing; and—you see, gentlemen, down there, to the left—a whole string of wheelbarrows in readiness to convey them to the post, that no time may be lost. Keep up your spirits, gentlemen; the letters will certainly be out to-day."

The next morning Dr. Leicester swallowed his breakfast; and, jumping into a cab, tore away to his broker's at the rate of twenty miles an hour.

"Are they out?" he cried, to the confidential clerk, the first person he saw there.

Of course the inquiry could have reference but to one line, the all-engrossing one, the Grand Atmospheric Moon and Middlesex: and that the clerk knew.

"Out this morning, sir; posted last night. Have you an allotment?"

The doctor had not. It was really too bad—so secure as he thought he had made himself with the solicitors!

"What premium are they out at?" he grumbled.

"No premium at all, sir," answered the clerk; "that is, there are no sellers. There's not a share in

the market. They have mostly got into good hands, and the allottees won't part with a single letter."

"How are the Southampton and Dundee Direct?" pursued the doctor, chiefly from want of something to say.

"Firm as a rock, and going up still. That was a capital spec of yours, sir—five and three-quarters, I think, you bought at?"

"Yes," nodded the doctor.

"And they are eleven and a half now. What a mint of money is being made!"

In this triumphant and satisfactory manner the time went on until the approach of November; the only slight drawback, generally experienced, being a lack of ready cash. George Little and Dr. Leicester both suffered from this. The former had invested all his gains in other allotments, and had begun to hold on, like other sensible people, instead of selling: and the doctor required ready money for household necessities. Every guinea he had taken in fees was invested in shares: his pockets were empty, and at times he felt quite embarrassed. His broker had succeeded in purchasing shares for him in the Grand Atmospheric Moon and Middlesex, at twenty pounds premium. To meet this call for payment, he had sold out shares in several less important lines, besides having borrowed

money on personal security. But households, however well established, cannot go on for ever without a shot in the locker. Dr. Leicester found this truth out, and he reluctantly came to the determination of sacrificing a few shares in the Southampton and Dundee Direct—which had risen to twelve, and stood firm at that—though it would be like having so many teeth drawn. Accordingly he betook himself to the city one morning early, to give the necessary orders to his brokers.

“I would sell *all* the shares in that line if I were you, sir,” observed the old clerk, confidentially, when he heard the doctor’s business. “I fear there’s something not right about the Southampton and Dundees.”

“What do you mean?” asked the doctor; much inclined to resent the implied aspersion on his beloved Southampton and Dundees.

“Burton came in just now and dropped something in an undertone about that line; and away went the governor to ‘Change in a flurry. He is a holder himself, you know, in the Southampton and Dundees—under the rose.”

“But there *cannot* be anything wrong with the Southampton and Dundees,” retorted the doctor. “Of all the lines projected that is the most promising, always excepting the Moon and the Middlesex. You know it is.”

"Well, sir, I only know what I tell you," said the old clerk meekly. "Perhaps you had better go out and make inquiries."

Away went Dr. Leicester to Bartholomew Lane. It was crammed to suffocation, and he was elbowing his way through the crowd when he met Fox, who was coming out of the Butler's Head, his clothes looking very white and dusty.

"Fox, what's up about the Southampton and Dundees?"

"*All's* up, sir," answered the man, with a look as blank as his pockets. "The surveyors can't—or won't—finish the plans and sections in time for the 30th of November, if they ever finish them at all: which is the last day allowed by Government—as of course you know. The failure to keep faith with the public was announced this morning, and the shares have gone down."

"Down to what?" groaned Dr. Leicester.

"To a *discount*! I had twelve to sell for a gent to-day—should have netted eighteen pounds by the job. There has been some underhand business at work, they say, and the losers are going mad about it. Look at this dust!"

Fox pointed to the state of his coat, as he spoke. Dr. Leicester haughtily demanded what that had to do with the Southampton and Dundees.

"This," explained Fox. "The projector's busts, all that had been cast, stood in the spare room at the offices, waiting till the stations were built; half-an-hour ago, the infuriated shareholders rushed in there and smashed them all. It's well they did not get hold of *him*. I went too; and turned in here to get a glass of ale after it, for the plaster of Paris smother made me thirsty. The outlay on that projected line has been enormous, they say."

"The committee must refund," returned Dr. Leicester, gloomily.

"Oh, ah! it's all very fine to talk of refunding; but if the money's *gone*, where is it to be refunded from?" Which was a remarkably sensible proposition of Mr. Fox's, and quite unanswerable.

As Dr. Leicester turned away, he saw his broker. The two stopped to condole with each other.

"They will indict the surveyors, won't they?" inquired the doctor.

"I trust they will indict all connected with it," answered the broker, in a passion. "It is a regular swindle. One million sixteen thousand pounds paid up—the directors, I suppose, kept *their* deposits in their pockets—and only eighty-four pounds seventeen shillings and ninepence-halfpenny remaining in the hands of the bankers to return amongst the shareholders; the rest made ducks and drakes of, every

farthing of it. I wish to my heart they may get sent to Botany Bay for life!"

Dr. Leicester sighed. It was bad news for him. "But," said he, "what a mercy that it's not the Moon and Middlesex!"

"What a line that is!" cried the broker, admiration superseding the doleful mood. "How the shares continue to go up!"

"Ay," assented the doctor. "I don't think I can screw my courage up to sell out of that, badly though I want some money."

"Some pigeons came down yesterday with reports from the engineers," resumed the broker. "First rate. The works are progressing gloriously."

But when the collapse of the Southampton and Dundee reached the ears of Mrs. Leicester, she once more spoke to her husband.

"Are you sure, Richard, that matters are going on quite right with us—with all these speculations?"

"Right!" uttered the doctor, in astonishment: for he fully thought all *was* right, in spite of his loss in the Southampton and Dundeas. Of which loss he made nothing to his wife. "Oh, just a few pounds," he slightly said: whereas it had been a frightful sum. "I was worth six thousand pounds a few months ago, and I am now worth twelve thousand."

"But not in money, Richard."

bolt, carrying desolation to the deluded speculators. That day, and the next, and the next, London went mad with despair. The more matters were inquired into, the worse they were. There had been a frightful amount of expenditure, and there was nothing to show for it, all the deposits having vanished, or been eaten up. What was to be done?

The first thing was, of course, to go upon the directors for the amount of the losses. To begin with, they attacked the bishop, he being a substantial and responsible man, readily got at. The right reverend prelate received them with the utmost suavity. Meekly, as befitted his calling, he assured the unhappy shareholders that he knew nothing whatever about the matter: if his name was on the directorship, it had been put there without his consent or knowledge. Which of course seemed likely and but reasonable—for was he not a bishop?—and nobody could prove the contrary. Neither had they any better luck with the other directors. Some decamped; some turned out to be men of straw; some successfully denied their liability: all slipped out of it as easily as eels slip out of their skins.

Other promising lines (on paper) shared the fate of the Middlesex and Moon; and thus the year 1845 came to an end, amidst a general collapse and much ruin.

But George Little, having tasted of the sweets of living by speculation, never attempted to go back to legitimate work. Some considerable time had elapsed since then; and he had managed in some way to keep his head above water; never quite sinking, and always expecting to make millions. As one great scheme failed, it seemed only to buoy him up to embrace another. He believed in them himself as confidently as would a child. He had nothing of the rogue about him; only he was so incredibly sanguine. Once, a fine fortune came to him unexpectedly, by the death of a distant relative. Did he retire with it, and live at ease? No. It only afforded him fresh means to feed his speculations. The Great Trebeddon Mines had recently been taken up by him, and with an amount of fervour that must be seen to be believed; he felt a firm conviction that they would compensate him for all previous losses, and bring him in showers of gold.

CHAPTER III.

FIVE THOUSAND A-YEAR.

THE weeks rolled by, and Mrs. Grainger was recovering. Not quite so speedily as her physician had hopefully prophesied, but, on the whole, very well. A shade of pink was returning to her cheeks, she only lay down now and then; and, the greatest sign of all, her naturally vigorous mind was resuming its tone. As to her husband, his whole thoughts and heart were concentrated upon one subject—the Great Trebeddon Mines.

One day, a little later than his usual hour for returning, he came bustling in, leaping up the stairs four at a time. His wife was in the drawing-room, one of her little children on her knee.

“How are you, Margaret? All right, I see. What is there for dinner?”

“For dinner!”

“Because I have asked Little to come in. He will be here in a minute or two.”

“To-day! I wish I had known. There’s no time now to make any addition.”

“Oh, Little’s not particular. He must take pot luck. I told him so. What is it?”

"Fish, and minced veal ; and lemon pudding."

"Capital. Just what he likes, I dare say. Really, Margaret, the vista opening to that man is truly astonishing."

"He is lucky."

"I am so glad you are well enough to be down with us in the dining-room, you will be so interested in what he says. Everybody must be. I declare I would rather have that man's prospects than be heir to the first dukedom in the three kingdoms."

Mrs. Grainger laughed.

"Indeed—— There's his knock ! Pack off that child, Margaret. Stay ! I'll ring the nursery-bell."

George Little was older now than he had been ; and one might have thought that the years and experience which had passed over his head since the time of the railway mania would have taught him caution. Not a bit of it. All the fresh schemes, entered into with so much hope, had failed. Either he had grown tired of them, or they of him. He had, it has been said, the most entire faith in whatever he undertook ; and was, so far, honest as the day. Mr. Grainger had known him about six months ; but during that time they had become very intimate. Most people liked George Little : his open, transparent nature and confiding temperament won its way. He was good-hearted, good-tempered, generous : a little

man, of rapid, eager speech, with keen dark eyes set deep in the head, and plenty of capacity above it. Nevertheless, there was an old-fashioned simplicity in his manners, that proved how genuine he was. Just now he was wild—wild—about these new mines. This was the first time Mrs. Grainger had seen him: her several months' illness had kept her in seclusion.

"Such a thing, ma'am!" he protested to her, when he was fairly launched on his all-engrossing subject, after they had discussed the minced-veal at dinner, and the rest of the good things. "Such a glorious prospect!"—and his earnest look, the ring of truth in his ready voice, proved, as ever, *his* perfect faith in what he asserted. "A piece of luck that is not met with once in a century. You have heard of Trebeddon?"

Mrs. Grainger said she had heard the place mentioned by her husband. She believed it was somewhere in Cornwall.

"In Cornwall it is. Colonel Hartlebury bought it three years ago for an old song, neither buyer nor seller suspecting the mines of wealth hidden underneath. It is only recently the discovery has been made. There's a princely fortune, ma'am, for a dozen people and for their families after them; down to, I don't know how many generations, for one cannot calculate it."

"The mines are copper, I believe?"

"Copper and tin, Margaret," broke in Mr. Grainger, his tone as enthusiastic as that of his guest. "On the neighbouring estate of Trewater there has been—how much realized to the shareholders since it has been worked, Little?"

"The last year they netted about four thousand pounds apiece. Something out of that was kept back for expenses: I forget what. You see, about a dozen only have got it in their own hands."

"But is there no risk?" inquired Mrs. Grainger.

"Not the slightest, if the thing is worked properly," answered Little. "It is as safe as the bank."

"But I have heard of large fortunes being lost in these mining speculations," she urged. "Of people being ruined, in fact."

"Of course you have, ma'am. Set a man, or a body of men, to any business they don't understand, or have not the proper ability to conduct—say only to keep a shop of sweetmeats—the concern will soon fall to the ground, and they with it. It is precisely the same thing with regard to the management of mines. A set of people who know nothing about it go hot-headed to work; they sink money here and shafts there; the first recklessly and the last wrongly. They can't get at the ore at all; or else can't get it up in sufficient quantities to pay; the money keeps

going out and nothing comes in. Soon they are at a standstill for want of capital; the thing is talked about on 'Change as a mad speculation, and the public turn up their eyes and wonder men can be so green. But the public forget that the valuable ore is there still, snug in its rich beds, and that the speculators have only gone to work the wrong way to get it out."

"Just so," applauded Adam Grainger.

"I'll bring you the last number of the *Mining Journal*, Grainger," added the talkative guest, turning to him, "which will bear out what I say. You will read an account of certain mines which have already yielded a profit of two millions sterling to the company working them."

"Two million pounds sterling!" repeated Adam Grainger with admiration. "In Cornwall?"

"In Cornwall. And these very identical mines had been abandoned by the first workers of them! They went at it the wrong way, you perceive, ma'am; reaped only disappointment; lost their money, grew tired, and forsook them. Another body of men, cautious, wealthy, and experienced, stepped in; and have found their reward. Two millions sterling have that lucky company already netted from what were looked upon as valueless mines."

"They must be a profitable source of wealth when they are judiciously managed," remarked Mrs. Grainger.

"Ma'am, the profits are too vast to be estimated. One's mind loses itself in the contemplation."

"I hear you are progressing well in these new mines of yours," she rejoined. "The Great Trebeddon."

"More than well," answered Little; "as will soon be proved. They abound in minerals of unusual value. The lodes already opened, both of copper and tin, are of superior quality: there's one beautiful lode of grey copper ore, the specimens of which do one's eyes good to look at. And there is already a quantity of Tribute ground opened, which will be available the instant the mines shall be at work."

"And that won't be long first, eh, Little?" said Mr. Grainger.

"Very shortly now. Then, ma'am, in the South strata mine the lodes are numerous; and so promising!" resumed the speaker; who seemed, in pure good nature, bent on enlightening Mrs. Grainger. "There's the Wheal Bang, and the Wheal Providence, and the Wheal Round—but I need not enumerate them. The Wheal Bang at the adit level, which is about twelve fathoms below the surface, is four feet wide, and shows a splendid gossum, soft sugar spar, iron pyrites, and rich copper ore. The gossum and quartz are of the finest description."

"I don't understand all those names," interrupted Mrs. Grainger, laughing.

Mr. Little laughed too. "Well, ma'am, I suppose you don't; they are not much in a lady's way. But I can assure you they are all there. I heard of these mines through a friend, who introduced me to Colonel Hartlebury; it is only a few months ago. I made inquiries, went down to the mines and examined matters in person, satisfied myself of the colossal fortune to be made, and succeeded in getting a substantial interest in them assigned me. I look upon my embarkation in these Great Trebeddon Mines as the one fortunate step of my life."

Mr. Grainger, listening eagerly, began to think it might turn out to be the one fortunate step of his. Perhaps there lies within the nature of every man an innate thirst for speculation, more or less great as circumstances may or may not arise to develop it. One thing at any rate is certain—that we are all eager to make money. If a benevolent magician in human form came to us and said, "Put a thousand guineas into my lucky-bag, and it shall return you two thousand," who would be able to resist the offer? Adam Grainger, associating with Little, believing in his great schemes, had become bitten with the mania of speculation; in other words, the desire to make money; and it was taking rapid hold upon him.

He had said to his wife that he felt inclined to embark his spare cash in the Great Trebeddon. In

point of fact, his mind was made up then, though he might not have known it; and he carried out the inclination. Within a week of this evening when Little dined with them, Adam Grainger had put into it all his money; withdrawing it from the five per cent. securities, where it had lain secure and safe. It was not very much; and well had it been for him had he embarked nothing more. But he was soon to lend his name, to lend his energies, and to lend his mind.

He held his lucrative appointment in one of our first-class insurance offices, which his father had held before him. His present salary was a thousand per annum, and it was a progressing one. Surely sufficient to satisfy the desires of a moderate man! He was putting by yearly, for those days were not the expensive ones of these, investing his savings lucratively. Money had come to him on the death of his mother. All of this, every penny of it, savings and bequeathed money, was thrown into the Great Trebeddon. And Mr. Grainger was happy.

A few more weeks went by. Mrs. Grainger was sufficiently well now to go out in a carriage; all things looked very prosperous.

One evening, upon coming home, Mr. Grainger found his wife had only then entered, for he met the carriage driving from the door. He began to scold.

"Margaret, this is too late for you to be out. Recollect you are not very strong yet."

"It is late for me, Adam, I know; but I was well wrapped up, and the carriage was closed. The truth is, I have been out shopping. I wanted a dress for the christening."

"What christening!"

"Baby's. He is six months old: quite time he was christened."

"Isn't it done?"

"Done! Why, Adam, I think George Little and his mines have put other things out of your head! Baby was only baptized."

"I knew it was something of the sort. But—about your going shopping? It was very imprudent, Margaret. I would have chosen your dress."

"You!" laughed Mrs. Grainger. "You don't know silk from woollen; stripes from checks."

"Don't I! Only try me."

"I will. I will try you now. I could not decide in the shop, so they put two or three silks in the carriage for me to choose from here. There are the parcels, if you will open them."

He did so. And displayed three silk dresses.

"What is that?—a fourth!" exclaimed Mrs. Grainger, detecting another parcel. "Oh, it is that handsome one. I told them not to send that. Sly

traders! they thought to tempt me, did they! Is it not beautiful, Adam?"

"Very. Much better than the others. Why don't you decide upon it?"

"Because it is too dear. I am not justified in giving the money. The fact is, Adam, I do not much want a new dress, for I have plenty of good ones, only I thought I should like to wear something new at little Walter's christening."

"You would like this dress, I see, Margaret. I will give it you."

Margaret laughed. "That will be something like robbing Peter to pay Paul. Whether it comes out of your pocket or mine, Adam, I suspect it is much the same. The dress is too costly."

"My dear, you need not hesitate at the cost of a gown. It is an insignificant item, taken in connection with the income that will soon be ours. In a little while, if you choose to spend ten times as much in dress as now, you may do so."

"Dear me! It seems as if one could not realize it. Yet we have been quite happy. We seem to have had all our wants fully supplied."

"Here—who's that?" he suddenly called out, hearing some one pass the door. "Sophy? Oh, it's you, Jemima," he added, as the nurse appeared. "Take that into your mistress's room." And he proceeded to put up the rejected silks.

"They will be sent for presently," said Mrs. Grainger. "Adam, sometimes I cannot think it is really true that so great a fortune is opening to us?"

"My dear, my share will not be a farthing less than five thousand a-year. I wish I was not hampered with that confounded office; I ought to be down in Cornwall on the spot, hastening the works on. However, it will not be long before I emancipate myself. Would you like a trip into Cornwall, Margaret?"

"When I am stronger."

"It would be the very thing for you, I know, and do the children good. Suppose we go down for three or four months when the weather gets warm! We could hire a furnished house, I dare say, in the neighbourhood of Trebeddon."

"And let this for the time?"

"Let this! No; give it up. I don't mind sacrificing some rent. When we return, we shall require a residence of far superior style to this. I saw Little to-day, Margaret, and he says they have begun to sink the whim-shaft."

"Whim-shaft?" she echoed.

"About sixty-five fathoms east of the big engine shaft, in the Great Tin Lode last discovered," ran on Mr. Grainger, too hurriedly to stop for explanation. "That tin lode is of exceeding richness, he says, and

from nine to eleven feet wide, ten fathoms below high-water mark; and it is so situated with the adjoining lodes that one engine will work the whole. You don't understand, I see."

"No," she answered, with an amused look.

"Were you ever in a mine, Margaret?"

"Never."

"You shall go down one, and see its wonders."

"But do ladies venture down such places?"

"Oh, it's nothing, if they have plenty of pluck. How delighted Algie will be to explore it! I shall take him down. The miners, round about the place, think these works of ours will yield a larger return than any in the district," added Mr. Grainger, returning to his hobby. They are putting up smiths' shops, powder and material houses, and I don't know what all."

"It must be running away with a great deal of money, Adam."

"Of course. But only think of the returns! We are fortunate in one thing: that the lord's dues are so moderate. Only one sixteenth."

"What did you say?" asked Mrs. Grainger, in doubt. "*Whose* dues?"

"The lord of the manor. What else did you think I spoke of?" he asked, looking at her. "The lord of the manor always has his lien on these things."

"Oh," said Margaret. "But, Adam, I think dinner must be ready."

That evening, talking together, the subject was broached of giving a christening party. Mr. and Mrs. Grainger had not been in the habit of giving christening parties—at any rate, on a grand scale. There was something in the mind of both of them that spoke against it. But, when we are rising up into greatness ideas expand, you know; and a sudden access of the world's favour is too apt to deaden qualms of conscience.

"If we do give a party, Margaret, it shall be a good one," spoke Mr. Grainger. "None of your paltry affairs. I wish we were in our new house!"

"This house is quite good enough, Adam."

"It will have to do, I conclude. And, look here, Margaret—what do you say to my asking Little to be godfather?"

"Ask him if you like. I like George Little."

"As does all the world. And what a rich man he will soon be!"

"But you were not thinking of that in connection with baby?—his riches?" cried Mrs. Grainger, wonderingly.

"Thinking of his riches in connection with baby! Why, of course I was not. I never want any god-parent to give my children so much as a spoon. You

know that, Margaret. One is obliged to have god-fathers and godmothers; the Church compels it; but I don't see of what use they are while the parents do their duty; and I'm sure I should never wish to prey upon their pockets. So far as our children go, they will be too well off to require fairy godpeople."

"I hope so," assented Mrs. Grainger. "And, if we do have a party, it shall be directly, Adam. I will get my dress made at once."

"Oh! we will give it," decided Mr. Grainger.

CHAPTER IV.

AN INTERLUDE.

THE handsome house of Adam Grainger was ablaze with light. And the house really was a handsome one, commodious also, in spite of the disparaging remarks he had made on it, since visions of wealth were breaking upon him. But Margaret made the most of it to-night: opened all available rooms and decorated them with flowers.

The baby, Walter, had been taken to church in the morning, and christened: afterwards Mr. Grainger and his wife dined quietly, with George Little for their only guest. At first they had meant to give a

dinner-party. But so many friends had to be asked: or, rather, there were so many whom they wished to ask: that the idea was abandoned and an evening party decided on.

In the principal room, in the rich silk dress the reader has already heard of, stood Mrs. Grainger, receiving her guests. Perhaps she had never in her life looked so well. Somewhat fragile still from her long illness, that but enhanced her charms; the excitement was giving to her cheeks a lovely flush, delicately beautiful. The silk was of pearl grey hue, gleaming with richness; it was much trimmed with some costly lace that Margaret happened to have by her; a blush rose peeped from its bosom's folds; another rose nestled in her soft brown hair. Margaret was conscious that she looked well to-night—and it was what she especially wished to do.

Not perhaps so much as a tribute to her vanity, as because one was coming in whose eyes she would be glad to look well. A slight feeling of mortification—it might be wrong to say resentment—had lain in her heart ever since the rejection of her hand by Captain Hoare. For, that Captain Hoare, or his father for him, had rejected her hand when he discovered she would not have a large fortune, was a fact indisputable. Margaret Channing had never loved Captain Hoare; but she did not like the slight put upon her; it

pricked like a thorn; and now that he and she were about to meet again, she naturally wished him to see her at her best.

Their encounter that morning—for the first time since the old days that seemed to Margaret so long ago—was one of those curious coincidences we sometimes observe in life. As Mrs. Grainger's own small christening party was entering the church, a larger and a gayer party was quitting it. For an instant some little confusion occurred; the inner porch was narrow, and a gentleman accidentally stepped on Mrs. Grainger's gown. He turned to apologize, and there was a mutual recognition. It was Captain Hoare. Major Hoare now.

"Miss Channing!" he exclaimed in the moment's impulse. "But, I beg your pardon"—catching sight of the baby, following in Margaret's wake—"no longer Miss Channing, I presume?"

A few words of explanation ensued. Major Hoare had been in India with his regiment for some few years, was home on leave, but would shortly go out again. A child of his had just been christened. But there was really no time for anything like detail; the clergyman waited at the font for this second baby, and Margaret could not linger.

"I should like to come and see you and Mr. Grainger if you will allow me," cordially spoke the

major in the hurry of parting: and Margaret said they should be very glad. "It must be to-day," he resumed: "we go to Scotland to-morrow on a visit to my wife's family. And I shall be occupied, I fear, all day—I have so much to do. Would you mind my calling in the evening? Some people with you? Oh, that's nothing. Farewell until then. Ah, here is my wife. She has heard of you."

For the first time Margaret observed a lady standing behind him. A little woman, who had a plain and homely, yet an attractive face. A faint colour tinged her own: he had talked of her, then, to his wife!

"Until this evening, then," said Major Hoare. And as he led his wife to one of the fine carriages, waiting with their powdered servants in attendance on them, Margaret saw that she was lame.

"A good woman, but not a handsome one," she decided in her mind, as she went forward to the front. "And no doubt a good wife."

The evening had come; and there stood Margaret in a blaze of light. A little joking had passed between her and her husband. "I don't know that I do care to see that man here," he said to her with mock severity. "He was my rival once, you know."

"Are you jealous, Adam?" she asked, laughing.

"Very jealous indeed," he answered, his eyes dancing with merriment.

However, here they were, expecting Major Hoare; and quite prepared, Adam as well as his wife, to receive him with cordial suavity.

The guests were coming in quickly. Adam was making himself as busy with them as his wife. He looked well—as he always did: a good-looking man, a gentleman, and one with whom the world was prospering.

But a somewhat curious incident occurred that night which shall be related. It is strictly true, and Margaret will remember it to her dying day. Often and often in later years did she recall it to her mind, and always with an uncertain, unsatisfied feeling of doubt. Was it only a piece of folly, a coincidence? Or was it what it purported to be, a warning touching events unforeseen?

Some more people were entering; a gentleman and lady. Margaret moved a step or two forward to welcome them. They were old friends of Mr. and Mrs. Grainger, the Reverend Charles Anderson and his sister; rather elderly people, who had come all the way from their residence ten miles off. It may as well be mentioned, en passant, that this fact, their distant home, caused their intercourse with the Graingers to be limited. Quite six months had

elapsed since the last meeting, for Miss Anderson had been an invalid as well as Mrs. Grainger; and they had not heard one syllable of the expected rise in Mr. Grainger's fortunes, or knew that he was becoming connected with any speculation whatever.

But, moving onwards by the side of Miss Anderson, came a strange lady, whom Margaret had never seen. She was a remarkable-looking woman: her height alone would have made her so; for, as it struck Margaret and many of the others present, she was the tallest woman in the civilized world—in fact, almost a giantess.

"My dear," said Miss Anderson to Margaret, "we have taken the liberty of bringing with us our friend, Mrs. Dale." And by that name she introduced the tall woman.

"Just come over from the West Indies; landed only yesterday morning at Southampton, reached us at night," Miss Anderson took occasion presently to mention in a whisper, when a seat had been found for Mrs. Dale. "Her husband and Charles were at school together when they were boys, and they have always kept up a correspondence. Mrs. Dale will stay a week with us, and then go on to some relatives in Norfolk."

"What an extraordinary height she is!" whispered back Margaret.

Miss Anderson smiled. "Do you know she quite

startled us when she came in last night. The room was but dimly lighted, for Charles's eyes, as you know, are not strong, and she looked like some huge phantom walking in. We had heard that Dale married a remarkably tall wife; but had no idea she could be anything like this. She seems a very nice woman, her manner notably quiet and retiring, and her voice gentle."

"Yes, I think I like her look," assented Margaret, glancing across at Mrs. Dale to examine her more critically. Her face was smooth and pale; her brown eyes were large, luminous, and set very deep in the head. In years she might have been somewhat past thirty. But Mrs. Grainger's thoughts soon wandered from her: her duties, as hostess, were relaxing.

"So you have got back!" she said, as George Little approached. For that gentleman had quitted the dinner-table before the cloth was well removed, to go about some of his multifarious engagements in the city, connected with the Trebeddon mines. "I am glad you are not late. Mr. Little, Miss Anderson."

"A pleasant-looking little man," remarked the clergyman's sister, as Little passed on. "Who is he? I don't remember to have seen him here before."

"No, I don't think you have. We have not known him very long. Adam and he are particularly intimate.

He stood to baby to-day. Adam and I were the other sponsors. You see——”

“Major and Lady Janet Hoare.”

Margaret's words ceased at the announcement, and her face slightly flushed once more as she turned it to the entrance. Had Major Hoare brought his wife? Yes, there she was; Lady Janet. The same little limping woman that Margaret had seen in the morning, with the same plain, homely face, and the same sweet expression on it.

“Will you pardon the intrusion and our lack of ceremony?” courteously asked Major Hoare, as he took Mrs. Grainger's hand. “Janet said she should like to accompany me, and we could not altogether help coming out together, as we are on our way to another party.”

In her honest Scotch fashion, so true and simple, Lady Janet was holding out her hand. Margaret shook it. Some difference existed between Lady Janet Hoare's place in the world and Mrs. Grainger's; but not an iota of its consciousness was there in Lady Janet's manner; no, nor in her heart. Plain she might be, and unattractive, as the world counts attraction; but, unless Margaret's judgment was strangely at fault, her whilom would-be lover had gained a prize in the matrimonial lottery.

“How nice, how very nice she is!” exclaimed

Margaret enthusiastically to Major Hoare, as Lady Janet moved away.

"I am glad you think so. I did not choose her for her beauty."

"Oh, but she has that which is better than beauty. Goodness. I am sure of it. She carries it in her countenance."

"She admires your beauty," returned the major, smiling; "she said so as we left the church this morning. I had often spoken of you to her."

"Had you?" replied Margaret, as she played absently with one of her bracelets.

"And I think she was somewhat curious to see you."

"Why—what did you tell her of me?" came the hasty question.

"I have told her before now that at one time of my life there was no living person I esteemed so highly as Margaret Channing."

A pause. He laid a stress on the word esteem. Margaret rallied her wits. "How she must have laughed at that!"

"Laughed? Indeed no. There was nothing to laugh at in it—or to cry either. I am sure she would be glad to make a friend of you, Mrs. Grainger: only it cannot be. You dwell at one end of the globe, and we at the other. We only return from Scotland to embark again."

"Lady Sophia is dead, I think," observed Margaret.
"I read of it in the papers."

"Yes; and my father has become an invalid."

"Have you many children?"

"Only two, living. A boy of four years old, and the little girl who was christened to-day."

"A little girl, was it. What have you named her?"

"Margaret."

"Margaret!" she could not help the quick echo of the name, or her tone of surprise.

"After my wife's sister," explained Major Hoare.
"Margaret Janet the child is named; but she will be called Margaret."

"I am sure they are nice children."

"Passably so—as children go," laughed the major.
"And you, Mrs. Grainger—how many have you?"

"Four. Two boys and two girls. Shall you take the baby to India?"

"That is a question that is puzzling us. My wife wishes to take her, naturally; but we are in doubt about the climate. Few children can stand it well—What an immense woman!"

Margaret followed the direction of his eyes. Standing in an adjoining room within view, was Mrs. Dale. She did look immense—towering up like a column.

"Yes, her height amazes me," replied Margaret.

"It is quite a misfortune to be so tall as that. I am sure she could not walk along the street without being followed by the boys."

"Who is she?"

"A stranger to me and Mr. Grainger. She came here to-night with some friends. Her home, I fancy, is in the West Indies."

"Well, she might spare some of her height, and be none the worse for it. What a pretty house you have here!" added Major Hoare, quitting the topic and glancing about the rooms, and the well-dressed company filling them.

"Yes, it is pretty. I am not sure but I shall regret to leave it."

"Are you about to leave it?"

"Shortly. We must move into a larger."

"You find this too small, then?"

"No, I cannot say we do. But—but Mr. Grainger expects to come into a good deal of property," she added briefly, putting the matter so for convenience' sake. "And that will necessitate a different style of living."

"He is lucky. We are anything but rich. Lady Janet will have a good fortune later; but she has not very much at present. And I am no richer than I used to be," he added, laughing. "You may remember how poor that was."

"I suppose we all have enough for our wants," remarked Margaret. "Wants increase with means."

"That's true enough. If—— Is that the baby?"

For at this juncture, all the company having arrived, or supposed to have arrived, the nurse came in to parade the baby, as by arrangement, once through the rooms. Not an infant in long clothes; but a fine baby of some months old, who sat up in Jemima's arms to look about him, and had the sleeves of his short white frock tied up with blue ribbons. Jemima, who had lived with Mrs. Grainger ever since she required a nurse, was a staid, most respectable-looking woman, plainly attired.

"I am not sure that it is at all an orthodox proceeding," said Margaret, alluding with a smile to the child's appearance. "He ought to be in bed and asleep, instead of exhibiting himself to the world. The custom of showing off a baby applies to dinner-time, not evening."

"And not always then. Why did you delay his christening so long?"

"On account of my illness. I have been laid up for many months, and no one knew whether I should live or die. He was baptized, but not christened. You have not given a christening dinner to-day?"

Major Hoare shook his head. "My wife is a Presbyterian, and rather a strict one; she does not like a

christening to be made a worldly festival. The people stayed luncheon with us. Breakfast, they called it."

But Margaret felt that one individual had engaged her attention sufficiently. She might not linger with him longer, and moved away amidst her guests, halting for a few minutes to enjoy a talk with Lady Janet.

By-and-by, Major Hoare and his wife made their adieux. A carpet quadrille was begun in one of the rooms, Margaret sitting down to play for it. Dancing had not been one of the projected amusements; but it is always welcome to the young. And the evening passed on.

"Would you like your fortune told?"

Mrs. Dale, who put the question, was seated at the table in the little card-room, slowly shuffling one of the packs of cards. Most of the people were at supper. Margaret, looking about to see that none were neglected, had come upon Mrs. Dale alone in the card-room.

"Oh, I beg your pardon; I am so sorry," she said, speaking warmly in her good feeling at witnessing what she thought was neglect. "Has no one offered to take you in to supper?"

"Nay, it is my own fault," was the answer. "I stay here by choice. Mr. Grainger and one or two more gentlemen were good enough to think of me; but I declined to go in. I never take supper."

"Will you not take just a glass of wine—and some jelly?"

"Nothing, thank you. My last meal invariably consists of a cup of arrow-root, which I take while undressing, and I know that will be ready for me on our return to the Vicarage. What a pleasant evening it has been!"

"It is very good of you to say so; but I fear you have found it dull," replied Margaret. "You have not danced, or played at cards, or—or talked much. All the while you seem to have been sitting still, looking on at others."

"I never dance. Fancy one of my height jigging about a room!" added the tall lady, with a brief smile. "And I rarely play at cards: they send me to sleep. I do not even know the moves at whist—if that is the right word to give it."

"Well, I wish we could have amused you better. And to find you here all by yourself! It seems most inhospitable."

But Mrs. Dale shook her head to the last remark, and a bright smile of gratitude went out of her face to Margaret. The latter could not help fancying that she must be inured to neglect, that any little attention struck upon her as strange. She was still toying with the cards, slowly and abstractedly.

"Would you like your fortune told?"

Margaret, to whom the question was suddenly put, laughed merrily in answer. "Can you tell fortunes?" she rejoined.

"Yes," said Mrs. Dale. "It is all I can do with the cards. I was taught the art by an old Indian woman."

"The art!" repeated Margaret, still laughing. "You are investing it with quite a serious entourage. Do the fortunes you tell come true?"

"I fear they do," said Mrs. Dale.

"You shall tell mine, then. I should like to have the future truly foretold."

Now, in saying this, Margaret Grainger spoke lightly, and meant lightly; attaching as much real importance to her words, and also to the proposal, as she might have given to some game played with her children. Nevertheless she entered into it cordially, eagerly, hoping the "fortune" would be a good one. Perhaps in the like case there are few of us but could own, in spite of our more sober senses, to an innate, semi-feeling of—what can we call it? Belief? Expectation? Some latent doubt whether the mysterious necromancy will not open out a leaf of the future to us.

Mrs. Dale bowed her head in acknowledgment of the permission, and at once passed the pack of cards across the table to Margaret. But ere they could be taken up, she laid her detaining hand upon them, and

spoke; some sudden thought apparently occurring to her.

"Before beginning, I must inquire whether you will hear all the cards say, good or bad?"

"Undoubtedly," replied Margaret, surprised at the question. "How could it be my fortune unless I heard it?"

"Friends have reproached me before now, when the cards have not been favourable, with having imparted to them the ill that the cards held. Therefore I like to inquire beforehand."

"Oh, please tell me *everything*, good or bad," said Margaret with warm eagerness.

"So be it. But I hope your fortune will be a good one. Shuffle the cards well, and then cut them into three."

Margaret did as desired. Mrs. Dale took up the three heaps one at a time, threw out some of the cards, and placed the rest in rows before her. Then she sat in perfect stillness, looking at them. The hum of voices from the distant supper-room came distinctly to Margaret's ear.

"I do not like their aspect," said Mrs. Dale at length, lifting her head from the cards. "Will you shuffle and cut again."

Margaret obeyed, doing just as before: and once more Mrs. Dale bent over the rows of cards, apparently

seeing what did not please her. This process was repeated again, and yet again. The fourth and final time, more of the cards were spread out by Mrs. Dale : and then she began to speak.

"You bade me tell you all, Mrs. Grainger."

"Certainly. All."

"Well, the cards are not propitious. I have rarely seen them worse. Misfortune is undoubtedly about to overtake your house. Each time it has come up most prominently."

In spite of her belief that this must be "all nonsense," Margaret felt an unpleasant twinge. "Of what nature is the misfortune?" she asked.

A pause of hesitation. "I cannot altogether tell."

"Perhaps I am going to be ill again?"

"Oh no; I see no sickness. Sickness appears to have been in the house, though, lately."

"Yes, I am only just recovering from a long illness. Possibly you knew that?"

Mrs. Dale raised her eyes and looked at Margaret. "I did not know it," she answered. And in truth she did not.

"There is great trouble in store," she resumed, all her attention once more given to the cards. "It is not upon yourself individually that it will fall, but upon the house generally. It seems to be connected with business affairs,—with money."

"A sign how little she knows; we are going to be richer than we have ever been," thought Margaret. "Will it be very dreadful trouble?" she added aloud, suppressing the mocking tone that rose to her lips.

"I fear it will be. And it will continue long—long. In fact, I can see no end to it."

At this moment, Miss Anderson, who had come out of the supper-room to look for her friend and visitor, entered the room. Margaret extended her finger warningly; a saucy smile upon her lips.

"Hush, please. You don't know what you may interrupt if you speak. I am having my fortune told." Upon which, Miss Anderson, echoing the smile, sat down, and looked on. Mrs. Dale had not taken her eyes off the cards. For all that appeared, she was unconscious of the addition to the company.

"You will quit this dwelling-house," she went on. "And——"

"That's true," interrupted Margaret. "We shall shortly leave it for a better."

"And you will quit it in the midst of woe and wailing," continued the oracle, hardly pausing at all. "Shall I go on?"

"Of course."

For some moments she did not go on; but kept looking in silence at the cards; now putting her fore-

finger upon one, with a light touch, now upon another, as if they required especial consideration.

"You are intimate with a dark man. He comes to the house a great deal."

"A dark man?" repeated Margaret, running over in her mind their various acquaintances. "I wonder if she means Little?—he has dark hair and eyes."

Mrs. Dale waited for the answer.

"A gentleman who is dark does come here frequently. He is an intimate friend of my husband's; not particularly so of mine."

"I have said that the threatened evil concerns the house generally, including your husband; not yourself alone," spoke Mrs. Dale. "This dark man is in some way connected with it. Either he will share it; that is, it will fall upon him as well as on you: or else he will be concerned in bringing it upon you. I think it is the latter."

"Why, he is the truest friend my husband possesses!" returned Margaret. "Quite like a benefactor."

"We may be thinking of two dark men, then," resumed Mrs. Dale, after again examining the cards. "One man; the one I mean, who is here conspicuously," pointing to the knave of clubs, "will bring your husband no good. You have shuffled the cards well each time. Is it not so?"

"Yes."

"But you have not been able to shuffle this man away from your husband. See; here he is still, at your husband's back: and it has been so each time the cards were turned up."

"Do you make my husband the king of hearts?"

"I make him what he is. I took notice of his complexion."

"That you might tell his fortune—or mine?" laughed Margaret.

"The idea that I should do anything of the kind never entered my mind until we were sitting here alone just now. I only proposed it to while away your time until your visitors came in from supper. And I should not have thought of it then but for seeing and handling the cards on the table."

"I was only joking," said Margaret.

"Rely upon it, this dark man—though it may not be the one you are thinking of—is bringing your house no good," continued Mrs. Dale, once more touching the offending card. "He seems to have a load of business upon his head."

"What else do the cards say?"

"Very little. With the exception of this one sweeping evil, they say almost nothing: that seems to be so great that all minor events are lost in it. I never saw cards show so little of events as these."

"It is not at all a good fortune, I must say."

Mrs. Dale gave no assent. In her heart she deemed it to be one of the worst she had ever foretold.

"I wonder if you believe in it?" cried Margaret.

"There it lies," was the answer—spreading her open hands above the pack. "The cards show nothing but misfortune."

"I wish you would tell me its nature. I might guard against it."

"I cannot tell that—save that it seems to be connected with business matters: with the bustle of out-of-door life. It appears to me that you will soon be entering on some long, dark, dreary road, from which there is no outlet. A narrow, dismal lane that we have to go down sometimes in life, plunging into its gloom from the cheerfulness of sunshine, is a type of it. And I can see no turning out of it, and no ending."

"And you believe that it will be so?"

"I do; for the cards show it. Some notable evil of some kind is coming on. Perhaps not very quickly; not just yet. And—that is all."

"And a very unsatisfactory 'all' it is," laughed Margaret. "What do you think, Miss Anderson?"

"I? My dear, I have always believed implicitly in fortune-telling since I was promised a lord for my husband. That is twenty-five years ago; and he has not come yet."

Miss Anderson spoke, of course, jestingly. In her opinion the whole matter was a jest altogether. She could as soon have believed in conjuring as in fortune-telling. And Margaret laughed again at the "promised lord."

"And I dare say this long lane of trouble will come just as much for me as the lord came for you," she said. "Nevertheless," turning graciously to Mrs. Dale, "I am very much obliged to you for the pains you have taken to amuse me. I think I should like to learn fortune-telling myself."

"Would you like to have a wish?" asked Mrs. Dale.

"Oh yes."

"Then shuffle the cards again."

The cards had not yet been disturbed, but lay as they were placed. Margaret gathered them up.

"Now what shall I wish?" she thought to herself, as she shuffled them. "I'll wish that this wretched rubbish may not come true."

"Well," said Mrs. Dale. "Are you ready?"

"Quite. I have wished."

"Then cut."

Some more manipulations with the cards, and Mrs. Dale pronounced the fiat. Again Fate was adverse.

"Shall I have my wish?" asked Margaret.

"No."

But now some people came pouring in from the supper-room. Mrs. Dale quietly mixed the cards together, just as though she were preparing to take a hand at whist. And the "fortune-telling" was over.

"But, my dear Margaret, you and your husband are too happy and prosperous to fear reverses," remarked Miss Anderson as she rose. "If every man were but as well off and as secure in his position as he is! Look at my poor brother! Having only two hundred a-year to make both ends meet upon—and with this fear of a disabling throat coming on!"

"Would you please play another set of quadrilles for us, Mrs. Grainger?"

"Nay," interposed a gentleman, "I think it is time Mrs. Grainger danced a quadrille herself. Some one else will play."

Margaret, all lightheartedness again, stood up, though she knew she was hardly strong enough to dance, especially after the day and night's exertions. But excitement carries off fatigue wonderfully; and no one was more active in the dance than she, no one more joyously happy. The promised ill-fortune had quite gone out of her mind, proving how little impression it had made there.

She remembered it again when she was undressing. The company gone, she went upstairs, leaving the

servants to put the rooms somewhat straight. The fatigue was telling upon her now. Sitting down by her dressing-room fire while she brushed out her hair, after drinking some warm wine-and-water, mixed for her, the evening's incidents passed through her mind, and amidst them the one in which Mrs. Dale had taken a prominent share.

"What do you think, Adam?" she cried, her husband just then entering the room. "I have had my fortune told!"

"Had your fortune told!" echoed Mr. Grainger.

"And it was the most lugubrious, miserable fortune you ever heard. That tall Mrs. Dale told it with the cards."

"What did she promise you?"

"Everything that's bad, I think. At any rate, nothing that was good. She said some frightful misfortunes were about to overtake us; and that she could see no end to them."

"Good soul!" cried Mr. Grainger.

"But I must say she told it well, Adam. Her manner was excellent; so quiet and impressive. You might have taken her for a real fortune-teller."

"She had need do something well: to make up for her unfortunate height. I thought at first she must have mistaken this for Carnival time, and come out upon stilts."

"What a gentle voice she has!"

"Yes; that's in her favour. And so she promised you ill luck, did she?"

"Dreadful luck. It was to come to you as well as to me; and to be connected with business and money—and with a dark man. The singular thing was, that she should believe in it herself."

"Nonsense, Margaret!"

"She appeared to."

"That's another thing."

"You don't think there can be anything in it, do you, Adam?"

Mr. Grainger, who was taking off his coat, turned to his wife in sheer amazement.

"*Do I think there can be anything in it!*" he repeated, his tone a mixture of astonishment, reproof, and mockery. "Anything in what?"

"In what the cards said."

"In what she said, you mean. I think there's a great deal in it. I shouldn't wonder but you and I are about to be tossed up to the moon in a blanket. Oh, Margaret!"

Mrs. Grainger burst into laughter. Had she entertained any little soupçon of uneasiness, his light manner effectually dispelled it. All her common sense came back to her. She was as ready to ridicule Mrs. Dale's pastime as he.

"Do you intend to sit brushing your hair all night, Margaret?"


"Not quite. I was thinking what dolorous fortunes I could promise, if I learned to tell them."

"Because it will be daylight soon," added he, alluding to the hour.

"And oh, what oceans of good luck! Dukes and lords—as Mary Anderson said; and gold and diamonds, and all kinds of bright things."

Thus, in careless joking, the night's incident passed away, and was thought of no more. Ay, and it died out of remembrance; for months had elapsed, if not years, ere it recalled itself again to memory.

The intelligent reader will of course ridicule this little episode. As before stated, it occurred: occurred exactly, and word for word, as it is written. For that reason it has been given here. And, though it lapsed from Margaret Grainger's mind at the time, in the insignificance to which it was entitled, it recurs to her now at odd moments; and will so recur to her until the last.



CHAPTER V.

WITH THE DIRECTORS.

THE great Trebeddon Mines prospered greatly. In this, the preliminary stage of the affair, when the mines were being prepared for working, and for yielding their returns later, not a cross or check occurred to damp the ardour of the promoters. Necessary money was found in abundance; all things wore a smiling aspect. A company was formed under the most favourable auspices; shares were allotted.

Adam Grainger, revelling in the new hobby that had taken hold of him, felt like a man in the seventh heaven. One only little drawback marred his satisfaction; perhaps some trifle or other does generally obtrude itself to mar perfect felicity in this world. Mr. Grainger's cross consisted in his not being able to give all his time to the new work.

For, his legitimate business in the insurance company still held him for many hours in the day. He was tied by the leg there. But for that, he would have been down at the mines, looking after the work in process; or busy in the heart of the City, at the new offices of the Great Trebeddon Company. How he chafed, and fumed, and rebelled, he alone knew.

Over and over again was he on the point of throwing up his appointment, that he might devote his whole time and energies to the Great Trebeddon. Later, he would certainly do this; he would have to do it. Fancy a wealthy mine-owner filling a paltry post, as actuary, or what not, in an old humbugging insurance company! No; Mr. Grainger would not continue in it much longer. Just a few weeks yet, perhaps, until the ore was coming out of the mines, and its returns were pouring in: for it is not altogether convenient to let one of our pockets run dry until the other shall be filling. And, if he flung up his post, he would fling up his income with it: which might cause him some temporary embarrassment.

One morning, upon Mr. Grainger's entering the offices of the insurance company at his customary hour, he was requested to walk into the directors' private room. Two of them were there: the chairman, Mr. Gatherby; and Mr. Phelps. They were growing in years now, and had been directors in his father's lifetime.

"Mr. Grainger—take a seat—we have requested you to step in here for the purpose of answering a question or two that we wish to put to you. Do you know anything of this?"

The chairman, as he spoke, opened a printed sheet of paper, and set it before him. Not a second glance

at it needed Grainger. It was the flaming prospectus of the Great Trebeddon Mining Company, which had been issued forth to the public: his own name appearing in it as large as life.

The chairman laid his pencil upon the spot. "'Adam Grainger, Esquire.' That must be you."

"It is, sir."

"Did you not know that it is a rule of this office that none of its clerks, superior or inferior, may connect themselves, in any way whatever, with any private or public company?"

"No, I did not," said Adam, the colour flashing into his face, at being, as he looked upon it, dictated to; he, a man of five thousand a-year in prospective!

"That is strange. Your father knew it well. I think it must have escaped your memory."

A dim recollection began to dawn on Adam Grainger that there was some such rule in existence. He had completely forgotten it.

"My being connected with the Trebeddon mines cannot render my services here less efficient," he said.

"That is not the question," interposed Mr. Phelps. "The rule is the rule, and all must abide by it. If you are suffered to transgress it, why may not every one else in our employ do the same?"

Mr. Grainger bit his lip.

"Besides, your being connected with an excitable

thing like this, does make your services here less efficient," observed the chairman. "Your thoughts are naturally given to this new scheme; they are taken from your legitimate duties."

"It is not a *scheme*," fired Adam, vexed at the irreverent tone applied to the Great Trebeddon; "it is a tangible, bonâ fide undertaking. The mines are second to none in England for richness of ore: they will yield immense returns."

"They don't yield them yet," curtly remarked the chairman, looking at the speaker through his spectacles. "I suspect they are absorbing funds, instead of yielding them."

"Of course they are, sir, at present. Nothing can be done in any business without an outlay at the first outset."

"May I ask how much of it you have contributed as your share?"

"All I had," was the light answer. "Three or four thousand pounds."

"Ah. Take my advice, Mr. Grainger: let your three or four thousand pounds go, and say nothing about the loss," said the chairman emphatically. "In after years you may count the loss a gain, if it shall have taught you prudence."

"Ay, ay," nodded old Phelps. "Let it go; let it go."

"Let my four thousand pounds go!" ejaculated Adam Grainger, believing the two grey-haired gentlemen before him must be candidates for Bedlam. "What for?"

"You will never get a shilling returned upon them, and you will only plunge deeper into the mire. Believe me; for it is true."

A thought flashed over Adam that some calamity, unknown to himself, must have occurred.

"Have you heard any ill of the Trebeddon mines?" he scarcely dared to inquire.

"None at all," said Mr. Gatherby: "but we know the nature of these things. We are unacquainted with the 'Great Trebeddon' except from this prospectus, and from the advertisements."

"I thought it could not be," he said, in a relieved tone. "It is the finest prospect, sir, that has appeared for years."

"If it is like some other mining prospects, it will be 'fine,'" observed the chairman. "They generally end in the ruin of all connected with them."

"Two ignorant old savages!" was the mental compliment of the listener.

"However—to bring the matter in question to an issue, Mr. Grainger. It resolves itself into this: either you must give up the Great Trebeddon, or you must give up your post with us."

"I have been contemplating the probability of giving up my post here later," he replied.

"It must be one or the other *now*," cried the chairman.

Mr. Phelps rose and laid his hand on the younger man's shoulder. "I regarded your father with no common esteem," he said, "and for his sake—and, it may be, a little for your own—I take an interest in you. *Be persuaded*. Look upon this new scheme with our eyes of experience, and remain with us. You will do so if you know when you are well off."

"I expect in a short time to be clearing my five thousand a-year from these mines," said the younger man, in a low tone. "There are not many of us in it, and the returns to be divided will be enormous."

The chairman coughed: not a pleasant cough to Adam, for it seemed full of mocking unbelief. "We shall be sorry to lose your services, Mr. Grainger," he said, suppressing its sound. "Rather than do so, we will make it better worth your while to stay with us: your salary shall be raised at once to twelve hundred a-year. Reflect well before you reject it: a bird in the hand is worth half-a-dozen in the bush, remember."

"I thank you greatly, gentlemen. But I would not give up the prospects opening to me for twice twelve hundred."

"Take until next Monday to consider," interposed old Phelps. "We do not insist upon your answer to-day."

"If you prefer to receive it, then," was the somewhat ungracious reply. "But it will be the same."

"Understand one thing, Mr. Grainger," said the chairman, in a sharp, decisive tone, for nothing vexed him like obstinacy: "we have gone from our usual course to give you this warning, out of regard to your late father; any other than you would have received summary dismissal. If, after this, you do give up your situation in this house, you give it up for ever. Under no circumstances will you be permitted to enter it again. I pass you my word of that, as chairman of the board of directors."

"Sir," returned Adam Grainger, "what could induce me to wish to re-enter it? My fortune will be made."

"Or marred."

"Oh, it will not be marred," smiled Adam.

"Very well, Mr. Grainger. Our interview for to-day is over."

"Until Monday next," added old Phelps.

"What a couple of plodding old tortoises they are!" thought Adam, as he took his seat in his own room, and settled himself to the business of the day.

"Margaret!" cried Mr. Grainger, bounding into his

wife's presence when he reached home in the evening, "it's all done."

He spoke in an unusually joyous tone, and she looked brightly up; probably expecting that the first year's five thousand pounds had arrived in a parcel.

"Yes! What is it?"

"Those old governors at the office have saved me the trouble of resigning. They called me in this morning, Gatherby and Phelps, to tell me they were ready to discharge me."

"Is that all?" said Margaret. "I suppose they knew you were getting above the situation—in fortune, I mean—and graciously released you."

"Oh, did they, though! They are a couple of slow old tubs, who can't get beyond the jog-trot way of their forefathers. The sort of people, you know, Margaret, who would rather jolt from here to York in a waggon than risk the railway. They gave me a lecture upon prudence—as keen a one as ever I had from my father—urged me to send the mines to the right-about, and to remain with them."

"Indeed!"

"And they offered to raise my salary to twelve hundred a-year if I would have done with the Trebeddon. And if not——"

"What?" asked Mrs. Grainger.

"There was the alternative of leaving them at once

By Monday next I must do one or the other. They need not ransack their brains to guess which it will be."

"So soon! Next Monday!"

"Some old rule they recalled to my recollection, which I declare I had forgotten, that no one employed in the company must put a finger into any other pie. I would not have minded staying on a quarter of a year longer, till the warm weather has come in and the thing is more afloat. But I don't care about it. It is as well as it is. So, in a few days, Margaret, I shall be my own master: a gentleman at large."

But Mrs. Grainger was considering. It might have been, that the sudden collapse of means when her father died had rendered her more cautious than young women are wont to be.

"Adam," she said, thoughtfully, "do you consider it will be prudent to throw up your situation before you receive returns from the other thing?"

"I cannot retain it, as I have connected myself with the mines. Did you not understand me?"

"You are *sure* of these returns from the mines?"

"The returns are as sure as if I had them at this moment in my hand. They will be speedy, too, Margaret."

Still Mrs. Grainger looked thoughtful. "A thousand a-year—twelve hundred you say now, I am sure they

are very liberal—is a serious sum to give up without an equivalent. Remember, we have four children.”

“Without an equivalent!” he repeated, opening his eyes in wonder. “Why, Margaret, you are borrowing ideas from Gatherby and Phelps. The equivalent will come in the shape of four or five times as much.”

“I think I meant without immediate equivalent.”

“Would any man be simple enough to give up a good post without equivalent? I should not be; you may be very sure of that; and it will not be long now before the returns come in, Margaret.”

“Well, you understand business matters better than I do,” conceded Mrs. Grainger. “But I wish you could retain your post until the good fortune was assured.”

“I have explained why I cannot. The slow old directors will not let me. And you would surely not recommend me to resign my share in the mines; to abandon my hopes, and my money, and all the glorious prospects that have opened to us! You would not wish that?”

“No, certainly not. That would be a great pity.”

“Don’t look so gloomy, Margaret.”

“Did I look gloomy? I did not know it. I was only thinking.”

“What were you thinking?”

“Adam, let me speak out. I know your nature is

so very sanguine, that I believe you see things with a brighter hue than most men. Little does the same. I was thinking, if the Trebeddon mines should not turn out as you expect—if they *should* fail—where shall we be?”

“Upon my word of honour, Margaret, you pay me a very high compliment! How long have you thought me a simpleton? Do you suppose I cannot see the way before me clearer than that? It is not a bit of use talking to women about business,” he continued, chafing considerably, “they can’t understand it.”

“My dear husband, your interests and mine are the same,” she gently said. “If I beg you to be cautious and prudent, it is for your sake as much as my own. Think of the children.”

“I do think of them: and of you, too. It is for their future that I am anxious to amass wealth. Were I a single man, with only myself to look to, I might as well go on in the old humdrum way. Twelve hundred a-year would suffice me well.”

Adam Grainger no doubt spoke as he thought: that if he had no one but himself to care for, he would be content with his salary. He was unconscious how thoroughly he was mistaken: he was unconscious that the speculating mania had fallen upon him; and that the power, urging him on, was *not* the future interest of his family, but the fever of the disorder.

There is no cure for it; none; until it has had its course. A pretty sharp cure generally comes then.

We are writing of the days gone by. Of a period when men of business did not expect to make a colossal fortune in no time, as many of them expect now, but were content to plod on almost to old age before they retired upon a competency and set-up their carriage and pair. At that time, an assured salary of ten or twelve hundred a-year was looked upon as a very first-rate position indeed; an income out of which a man might live in every needful way as a gentleman, and bring up his children well, and save out of it for his decline of life. Therefore Adam Grainger's wife might well experience some latent doubts as to the wisdom of giving up so desirable a position for an uncertainty, however brilliant the prospect looked to the eye. The world has altered nowadays: some people would say improved. And the sons of those cautious old business men set out to make a million or two in a few years, and drive down in their broughams of a day to do it.

But the Great Trebeddon was getting up its name in the world, and its patronizers would not have exchanged it for the mines of Golconda.

CHAPTER VI.

RESULTS.

THE time went on to autumn. say, rather to the beginning of winter. No particular change had yet taken place in regard to these friends we are writing of; excepting, perhaps, in the manner of Adam Grainger. Anxiety, disappointment, and hope deferred were rendering his naturally sweet temper an irritable one.

The Great Trebeddon Mines could not be said to have failed, and they could not be said to have prospered; they were hovering between the two extremes. One of the unhappy speculators who had purchased a right in them was in the habit of likening them to the horse-leech; since they sucked in all the money that could be raised, and were continually asking for more. Give, give! give, give! it was their incessant cry: but they seemed determined to render nothing in return. At any rate, they were very slow about it.

Mr. Grainger, being now, as he once expressed it to his wife, a gentleman at large, had been down to see the mines. Having relieved himself of other occupation, he had full leisure to attend to them, and thought nothing of taking a run into Cornwall. The first

time he had remained a fortnight there, and had come up enraptured ; the second time he stayed three weeks, and came up more enraptured still ; the third and last time, he had returned not quite so much so. For, to have the results they were waiting and watching for prolonged week after week and month after month, was, to say the least of it, tantalizing. Now, this reason was assigned for the delay in getting up the ore, now that reason ; it was fearfully trying to the patience of the shareholders.

We have only to do with one of those confiding gentlemen ; and that is Adam Grainger. To him this lack of realization was not only annoying, but productive of great inconvenience. He had committed one very special act of imprudence. When a cheque, for the salary due, was handed to him by the Insurance Company, he went forthwith and paid it into the Great Trebeddon exchequer : thus depriving himself of ready money to go on with whilst the mine was yielding its tardy returns. The consequence was, that he was pretty nearly at his wits' end for necessary cash, and his wife was quite at hers. They were still in their house, not yet having moved to the larger one wished for.

He was sitting over the fire in the drawing-room one wintry day, the skies seeming to threaten snow, seriously considering what on earth he could do to

obtain some present cash, when his wife came in, and drew a chair to the table; on which lay some light work.

"Adam," she began, her face wearing a look of anxious uneasiness, "I really must have some money to go on with. Do you know that the tradespeople are beginning to refuse further trust?"

"Which of the tradespeople?"

"None of them are so attentive as they formerly were; so anxious to send for orders. But the butcher is growing troublesome."

"An ungrateful dog!" exclaimed Mr. Grainger. "Seven years have we been good customers to him, and paid him weekly. What does the man mean?"

"Adam, don't be cross. That will not mend matters."

How could he help being cross? The position he had placed himself in, the petty annoyances it continually brought upon him, would try the sweetest temper. Mrs. Grainger resumed.

"We must put ourselves in these people's places before we blame them. It is six months—eight, nearly—since they have received any money; and they know you are no longer in the insurance office. I wonder they have given us credit so long as this. And I—I have been wishing——"

"Wishing what?"

"To discharge, if you have no objection, two of the servants," she continued with deprecation, knowing how sensitive he was becoming. "We can do very well with the others."

"Margaret, you will drive me wild! What in the world is the good of taking a gloomy view of things? To talk in this way is to dispirit one for everything. It cannot be long, now, before we have returns: the ore is in the mines, and must be made to realize. We shall soon have plenty of money."

"So we have thought for the past six months," she ventured to say, "and it does not come. By discharging two of the servants, we should lessen expenses so far. It will be better to do it."

"Yes! and so stop our credit at once by letting it be known in the neighbourhood that we are compelled to curtail our establishment! You cannot see an inch beyond your nose, Margaret!"

Mrs. Grainger thought she could see much further, but did not contest the point. "They are asking for their wages," she said.

"They must wait," was his authoritative answer.

"And there is something else being asked for. Though really, Adam, I cannot bear to speak of these things, you take me up so sharply."

"Not you, Margaret," he said, in a softer tone; "you know that. But these stupid people vex me

with their folly. What is it that is being asked for ? ”

“ The rent,” she said, in a low voice.

“ The rent ! What, by old Barker ? ”

“ He called when you were gone to the City yesterday. He said he was sorry to be pressing, but he feared you had got into a mess that you would not readily get out of, and of course he must look to his own interest. He spoke civilly.”

“ Civilly you call it ? ” foamed Mr. Grainger, feeling that he should like to knock old Barker down. “ *What* did he say—that I had got into a mess ? ”

“ Mess, or mesh ; I did not rightly hear which, and did not ask him. I don’t think he will wait much longer, Adam. Three quarters are owing now.”

“ The insolent old miser ! Afraid of three-quarters-of-a-year’s rent !—from *me* ! He must have taken leave of his senses. Have I not always paid him regularly ? Surely he can wait a little now ? ”

“ Adam, I do not think you see things in quite their right light. If we were as we used to be, people would not mind waiting years for their money : they would wait, and never ask for it. But it is the fact of your not doing anything just now, of your not being in a way of making money, that alarms them.”

“ They have no right to be alarmed. They are most unreasonable.”

"But——"

"And, not in any way of making money!" he interrupted, catching at another offending sentence. "How can you say so when you know that the mining operations are going on most prosperously, though slowly, and that thousands must be on their way to me! I am surprised at you, Margaret."

"Adam, I should be as glad to convince them of this as you would be. But they won't be convinced. They know all about the mines; things get talked of, you know; and they seem to have no faith. One of them remarked to the servants here, 'The mines are ticklish things: people as often lose their money in them as get any out.' If——"

"Do be quiet, Margaret!" was the impatient interruption. "I thought you were above listening to the idle talk of butchers and bakers and candlestick makers! At any rate, you might be above repeating it."

She sighed, turned to the table, and took up the work that lay upon it. When Adam was in these unreasonable moods, it was of no use talking to him. With all her heart, she wished that the uncomfortable time of suspense was over, and the money coming in.

"What I have done has been all for the best, Margaret, though it may be a little troublesome to

wait, and will turn out to be for the best. In a very short time now you will acknowledge it."

He went out of the room as he spoke, encountering one of the servants outside.

"Mr. Little has called, sir," she said. "He is in the dining-room."

"Little! Oh, that's right: the very man I should like to see," he exclaimed in glad surprise: for he had believed Little to be in Cornwall. And if Adam Grainger had faith in one living man above all others, it was in him.

"So you have returned!" was his salutation as he shook hands with his guest: who was making himself quite at home, as usual, and turned round from poking the fire vigorously

"Came up last night."

"And how go on things in Cornwall?"

"Well, slower than we like to see them," answered George Little, with somewhat less of gushing confidence than he generally spoke. "The fact is, there has been more trouble to get these mines in working order than any of us anticipated. Things looked so promising at first."

"Do you mean to say they don't look promising now?" demanded Mr. Grainger, with a touch of wrath. How these repeated disappointments fretted him!

"They are as promising as ever," affirmed George Little. "But the difficulty is to realize the promises. We are at a standstill for want of money."

"Not at a complete standstill?"

"I am sorry to say we are."

"A complete standstill!" repeated Adam, staring at his friend as though he were unable to believe the news.

"Men, and works, and all. Can't get on without money."

"Child must advance it."

"Child won't. I have just been to him, and he flew into a regular passion. Says he washes his hands of the whole concern—and wished the mines had been in a certain hot place before he had ever heard of them. But I caught a whisper down at Trebeddon, that Child had been burning his fingers with some other speculation, and had not the money to advance," added George Little. "I firmly believe it is so."

"Colonel Hartlebury must find it."

"Hartlebury's cleaned out: has been for some time Down to his half-pay."

Adam Grainger sat and drummed on the table.

"How much is wanted now?" he asked.

"About two thousand pounds. We compute——"

"Why, it was two thousands pounds three months

ago ; and you have had double that sum since ! ” came the interruption.

“ It was that influx of water that played the deuce with us. But we now believe, and with reason, that two thousand would bring the ore into the market. Of course, every step has advanced us nearer to it.”

“ What is to be done ? ”

“ Can you give us a little more help, Grainger ? ”

“ You may as well ask this table for help as me. Those bills you got me to sign, and raise money upon, will soon be due, and I don’t possess a brass farthing towards meeting them. It is a good thing Mrs. Grainger knows nothing about the bills : she would worry herself about them night and day.”

“ We are all in the same predicament,” cried Little.

“ No, you are not,” was the quick response. “ All of you have not got bills out. You have no idea how badly I want money for my private use,” he added, in a lower tone. “ During this period of waiting, I have been obliged to go about amidst my acquaintances, and levy contributions from them in small sums, and I am anxious to pay them back. My wife knows nothing of it.”

George Little looked gloomy. Never a more sympathizing man than he. Had he had money in his pocket, he would have handed it over to Adam there and then.

"If we don't get the ore into the market speedily, it will play Old Gooseberry with us all," said he. "I know that."

"We *must* get it in, Little."

"I know we must. But I don't see how it's to be done, unless money can be found. There's not a hundred pounds amongst us, that's available."

Adam kept on with his drumming. "Have you seen Green?"

"No. I am going to call upon him when I go back to the City. Green can do nothing."

"I'll go with you," said Mr. Grainger. "We must stir heaven and earth about this. It would be desperation for it to fail now."

"And a debtor's gaol and the Bankruptcy Court, after it," nodded Little.

Adam Grainger's face flushed hot, and he passed his handkerchief over it.

"Better set on and hang ourselves than stand that," added Little, as they went out.

From this place to that; here, there, and everywhere; did the two men proceed that day, hoping to pick up fresh funds for the mines that were at a standstill for the lack of them. Did the doubt, the delay, the difficulty, the reluctance of all men to whom they applied for help, nay, their *refusal*, serve to effect the cure, and open the eyes of Mr. Grainger?

Not it. Not yet. If he had had ten thousand pounds at his command, he would still have thrown it into the yawning gulf. But he had not the ten thousand. No, nor ten pounds.

Some money was at last raised somehow, and it followed the rest. All in vain. Whether the ore was in the mine, or whether it was not, it gave no signs of coming out of it. A short time of feverish excitement went on, hope and despair alternating, and then the end came.

Reader! you remember those two remarkable plates in the book of "Martin Chuzzlewit"? The wondrous city of Eden as it appeared in print, and the wondrous city of Eden as it proved in reality. You remember Martin's rapture; his uplifted hands and eyes when reverently contemplating the public buildings in the picture; his indignation at Mark Tapley's somewhat suspicious remark, "Perhaps they grewed spontaneous." Just what that flourishing city of Eden, in print, was to the enraptured mind of Martin Chuzzlewit, had the Great Trebeddon Mines been to Adam Grainger; and just what the city proved to be when the two expectant travellers reached it—a feverish swamp, a wild ruin—had the Great Trebeddon Mines faded to now.

The Great Trebeddon Mines proved a failure. Just as too many other mines have proved before them.

Whether from lack of copper or tin—or whatever might be the ore they were supposed to contain—or from lack of capital to disembowel it, is of no consequence here: they failed, and ruin overtook many who had connected themselves with them. Ruin the most perfect fell upon Adam Grainger.

Christmas passed quietly; and then all the ill rushed on him at once. The bills he had accepted became due, and he was sued upon them; the report of that, and the failure of the mines flew about far and wide; the landlord paid him a visit in the peculiar fashion loved by landlords, and all the tradespeople came down upon him together. Adam and his wife were turned out of their once pleasant house, to face the mercies of a cold world.

Close upon that, Mrs. Grainger was left to battle out her trials alone, as she best could, for her husband was taken to cool his ardour within the walls of the Queen's Bench prison. It seemed to Margaret the worst blow of all.

And so that was the ending of the wonderful *El Dorado* that was to have made the fortune of all its promoters, and of the five thousand a-year of Adam Grainger.

PART THE THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

DRINKING IT TO THE DREGS.

(Extracts from the Diary of Adam Grainger.)

April the 20th.—Another day gone, and no relief! How is this to end? My brain becomes bewildered with excess of thought, and a strange whirling of it sometimes comes on, which turns my thoughts involuntarily towards madness. *A whirling of the brain!* Gabblers, who feel not what they say; poets, in their whispered measures; lovers, in their doubts and fears, prate of this: it is a common expression: the brain whirls, they say. But how little do they experience that of which they speak! The few, who have indeed gone through this agony of the brain, tell it not. When the paroxysm has left me, my frame trembles, my hands burn, and my heart is sick.

Insanity is deemed a thing to shudder at, and I have shuddered with the rest. I remember a party

of us once dining together ; little more than boys we were ; joyous fellows, rioting in the full sense of youth and life ; and the conversation turned upon misfortune—an odd theme for *us*. Each gave his opinion as to what was the most distressing fate that could overtake man. I said madness. *But there are moments, now, when I envy those who are shut up in that secured building, the dome of which towers above this great metropolitan city.* Bedlam ! Bedlam ! were I an inmate of your walls—— After a weary day of toil, how sweet is the homely bed on which the labourer sinks to rest ! and so a vision comes over me of sinking into insanity. I dare not say a longing vision ; but as the one gives rest to the body, so the other would bring rest to the spirit—my troubled spirit !

Friday.—I have been reading again the public advertisements. A gentleman is wanted to superintend an office. Qualifications requisite : liberal education, gentlemanly appearance and manners, age about thirty-five, a good general knowledge of business, and to give security. Should I be able to obtain the latter ? Why speculate on it ? My application to the advertisers will but share the old fate, and bring forth no reply.

I have deserved my lot. People tell me so, and

they speak only the truth. What did I want with speculation? Was not the honourable appointment I held sufficient for me? I am not the first who has thrown away the substance to grasp the shadow. I richly merited the ruin that overtook me: but unfortunately into the same ruin I dragged my wife and children.

How many years is it ago? Five? Six? Seven? I seem to have lost count of them.

When I look back on these years I ask myself how we have lived; and I cannot answer. Things have only gone on from bad to worse: if indeed they were not as bad at first as they could be. Our once happy home—not a vestige of it remains. Struggles, debts, duns, avoidance of creditors; these have been ours. One day spent in scheming how to obtain a dinner for the next, and in harassing uncertainties as to where we should the approaching week lay our heads. A few pounds from one source; a few from another; half-a-dozen shillings, begged or borrowed, serving for the supplies of one day; none the next; comforts not even glanced at: luxuries remembered as things that exist not for us; bare necessities scantily supplied, and not always! And thus have we gone on for weeks, and months, and years.

Saturday.—Another week ended. Surely the

approaching one must bring something to pass. And yet—how many weeks have gone before it, and have brought nothing! How harshly do those who have not known adversity judge of the world! they imagine that dishonour, if not crime, must necessarily attend fallen fortunes. So-and-so is “sold up,” cried some one in my hearing at a place where I was the other day. “Turned out of house and home: and he’s over head and ears in debt besides! I look upon a fellow, sir, who runs headlong into debt, as little better than a swindler and a robber.” Harsh epithets for one man to bestow upon another!

I dread to-night. For I am in debt; petty debt to petty tradespeople around the neighbourhood in this suburb that is our present refuge; and they will come at this, the end of the week, knocking at the door. But not voluntary debt: no, no; never think it. I was bred with the nicest sense of honour; taught to avoid debt as a crime: I would endure the sharp pangs of famine, even unto death—I *have* tasted of them—rather than sustain life by obtaining food for which I could not pay; but I dare not let those starve who depend on me for support. How eagerly I have struggled, and do struggle, to obtain employment, none can know; no matter what it might be; anything that would but bring in the money for a bit of bread; and succeed I cannot.

Sunday morning.—Thank God for Sunday ! When I awake in the morning, and the remembrance that it is the Sabbath comes rushing over me, the thought speaks blessings to my soul. *A day of rest and peace.* How many, without this intervening cessation of their fiery antagonism with the world, would lay down their heads hopelessly and die ! To-day everything is lovely ; everything in the outward visible world. The trees are clothed in the fresh green of early spring, the hedges are budding forth, the flowers are opening to the warm rays of the sun. Quiet reigns around ; sounds of everyday life are not, and the very air is at rest. A rest that soothes the mind, and almost speaks of hope.

Now the bells have begun for morning service. They are ringing to-day. I wonder why ? A more pleasing sound than the ding-dong of ordinary Sundays. Why can't they always ring ? I remember now—one of the highest of our High Church dignitaries comes down to preach to-day in this suburb : that must be why they are ringing.

How long is it since I have been to church ! Let none condemn me until they are placed in my circumstances, and as sorely tried as I have been. There was no missing church before adversity came. I cannot afford a pew, and our clothes are not what they used to be. Margaret goes sometimes : she cannot

forget that she is the daughter of a High Churchman. If Dr. Channing could rise from his grave and witness the straits to which my imprudence has reduced her ! A vision, an imaginary vista of the future, now and then steals over me on these calm, holy days—of these dark years being replaced by bright ones ; of the children growing up around us, anxiously trained in all the observances of religion ; when we shall sit, drawn together in peace and happiness, under our own vine and our own fig-tree, all the happier, the holier, for past adversity. For a time I lose myself in the fancy. But these hopeful dreams are broken off, as now, by the rushing thought that it is only a dream, and never to be realized.

Never, never : the darkness has endured too long. I have humbly prostrated myself in agony, imploring of the Most High, in my bitter grief and repentance, that for my wife and children's sake He would turn our captivity : and He has answered not. The darkness has become more dark, the light of the future more dim and indistinct. Now the clocks are striking eleven ; the bells are ceasing : in another moment not a sound will break the stillness.

Oh, thank God for Sunday ! I could repeat it with my pen, as I have done with my heart, a thousand times. No one can truly estimate the blessings of the day, until he shall have gone through the persecution

which has so long been mine. How infinite the wisdom, how unsparing the bounty that appointed one day in seven as a day of *rest*! One half of the world go down to their graves, and have never appreciated the boon in all its fulness. Let me lay aside my pen and think, and enjoy it while I may: to-morrow will come.

May. Tuesday.—Surely there is a spell upon all I undertake. I had almost written a curse: but let me not think that yet. If the morning opens with fair auspices, the night brings disappointment. Margaret is almost wearied out, and her naturally calm temper at moments gives way. Not for herself: but for the children I can see that her spirit is nearly broken. Still she bears up wonderfully.

We were standing last evening at the parlour-window, without light, when little Carry ran in. "Mamma, we want to dance. Will you come and tune to us?"

"Not to-night, darling. My head aches. You must dance to your own tunes to-night."

"Oh dear! And Jemima's cross, and won't answer when we ask her. Mamma, do you know what Isabel says?—she says she wishes we had our piano again, and the nice music-stool that turned round, and she says I was too little then to remember them. Why have we not got them now?"

"Because—they were left in the old house, Carry."

"What a shame! When shall we go back to that house, mamma?"

"Some time," returned Margaret, "or to one as good." And Carry danced away again.

"You spoke earnestly to the child, Margaret," I said. "Spoke as if you had faith."

"I have faith; trusting, earnest faith that this terrible time will come to an end. I wish I could see you, Adam, with more of it."

"I had faith also, until I was wearied out."

"I know we have waited long," said Margaret; "and there are times when I give way to despondency: but the mood soon changes again. A bright evening after a rainy day; a bit of blue sky peeping out of the leaden clouds; a green leaf budding on a wintry tree; the first promising glimmer of the new moon—all these speak of hope to my inward spirit."

Time was when I thought as my wife does. I was ever more sanguine than she. When despair was ready to overtake me, I had said, Courage and patience! courage and patience! and so buoyed myself up. But day succeeded day, week followed week, month replaced month, and year gives turn to year; and there is no change.

Friday.—I can no longer rest properly at night;

for the harassing annoyances and disappointments that make up the day are repeated with vivid intensity in my dreams. Towards morning especially, my mind is busy with the previous day's persecutions, the doubting dread of the one forthcoming. All is enacted and re-enacted with terrible distinctness; and I awake weary and unrefreshed from imaginary evils, to get up and live over again the reality.

Wednesday.—Gibbons' house wants a clerk. I am going to apply for it. Salary a hundred pounds a-year. Margaret looked grave when I mentioned the amount, and heaved a deep sigh. "But it is better than nothing, Adam," she said the next moment. Better than nothing! Yes, it will keep body and soul together until we can turn ourselves round. "To-morrow morning," I said aloud, "I will go there." "Mind you go in time," answered my wife.

Thursday night.—I did go. I was unsuccessful. It is ever so. The second partner, Snail, a man who was once proud to shake my hand, coldly said they should prefer engaging one who had been brought up to warehouse business, and absolutely hinted that he thought me too much of a gentleman for the post. I passed by the Thames on my way home to-night, and thought how calmly one might lie there underneath the waters, *if one could but lie there undisturbed for ever.*


CHAPTER II.

HOPELESS MISERY.

(Continuation of the Diary of Adam Grainger.)

Monday morning.—The commencement of another week of pain. This time yesterday 'I had at least some hours of peace before me. But now the strife begins again. I was reading last night the Book of Job. It deceived my mind into hope. Who was afflicted as he was? and yet "the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning."

But, have I Job's spirit of resignation? Why deceive myself? No. Before these dark misfortunes fell upon me, had I lost my children at one fell swoop, as he did, rather than have bowed my head in submission, I should have cried out as did David for Absalom—Would God I had died for thee, my child, my child! Yet, I feel now that I could bless the Hand which removed them all; removed them from the storms of this world to shelter them in the bosom of a Father, willing and more able to protect them than I am. Alone, I should not care for my misfortunes. I would go out from all who knew me; roam the country in search of work; break stones upon the road—anything for a crust; and wait for better times.



Tuesday.—I must carry out the project I have had so long running in my head, and apply to Lewis. We played together in boyhood, we were inseparable in youth, in manhood friends. He has it amply in his power to assist me, and I cannot think that he would want the will. A hundred pounds, to him, would be nothing; to me, salvation. With such a sum in hand, I believe I could extricate myself. Part of it would pay what we owe in this neighbourhood, and the rest I could use to good account. As it is, my whole time is taken up in endeavouring to obtain that which will enable us to go on and live for another day. We must exist: but we could eat hard fare, and endure many privations, if we had but peace from without. Let us be enabled to surmount this wearing struggle, endure on in retirement a little longer, and perhaps in time—— Oh this hope! how it comes stealing in!

“Our misfortunes have taught me one thing,” observed Margaret, as we sat together last night, after the children were in bed.

“I should have thought they might have taught you many things, Margaret. What is it?”

“That those we are apt to term ‘the poor’ are not the class who most need relief.”

“Oh, that.”

“I was getting to think much about the poor,” she

resumed, "just as these dreadful troubles came on, and when any case of distress came under my notice, I was so pleased to relieve it. But, Adam, it never occurred to me to relieve the distress of those, struggling in secret to live and to keep up respectability; gentle-people reduced by misfortunes, like ourselves. I never looked out for such cases: perhaps never thought there were such. Do you remember that poor Mrs. Smith, where Algie first went to school?"

"No."

"Oh, you must: they lived almost opposite. Her husband was a teacher of languages, and I believe had nothing to do."

"I remember now. A tall, thin fellow. She died."

"Well, listen. Sophy would often say to me, when she brought Algernon in from school——"

"Stop a bit, Margaret. Who was Sophy?"

"Adam, how you forget! She was the under-nurse; under Jemima. Sophy would often say Mrs. Smith was ill. But I never supposed she was seriously ill; I did not trouble myself to suppose about it, though I sometimes, more from habit than anything else, would ask after her: her head might ache from the noise of the children, her spirits might be dull: I thought no more. But one morning, upon Sophy's taking Algernon as usual, she brought him back, and said that Mrs. Smith was dead."

"Ay, I remember hearing about it."

"Adam, I never can describe the shock it was to me. I believe it threw me back weeks. Dead! A young and tolerably healthy woman! What had she died of, I asked. Rapid consumption; accelerated, there was no doubt, by the want of comforts. How I reproached myself! I was then supposed to be at death's door, and had been for some time, but every luxury surrounded me: delicacies that I could not eat, wines that I could not drink; skilful medical attendants, careful nurses, attentive servants. A tithe of this might have saved *her* life, and I had sent her nothing! Yet I knew, if I had given it a thought, that he was out of employment, and it would not have taken me much calculation to add up the gains of that weekly school—a dozen pupils at a shilling a-week! Perhaps, poor lady, she longed, in her wasting health, to send and crave from our house the nourishment that would have comforted her, for she knew it was there in abundance; and she could sit at her own cheerless windows, and watch ours, gay with lights and fire. I shed many tears over my carelessness: but they could not bring her back to life."

"Which must have been highly foolish of you, Margaret."

"The bare facts of the case stood out so broad and hideous. The woman was lying dead, close at my

door; had died in privation. She who had spent her sick and weary days instructing my child and his companions, had passed in cold neglect from life unto death. It will always be a reproach to me."

"Any more reproaches, Margaret?"

"Plenty, if you like to hear them. You have not forgotten that poor Mrs. Hughes, who——"

Margaret's tale was suddenly cut short. Late though the hour was, a man came dunning me for money: and he stayed to abuse me because I could not pay him.

Thursday morning.—My dear little Algernon has just come to me—"Papa, look at my shoes! All the toes out. I can't go to school like this: the boys made game of me yesterday, and asked why I wore such things."

"They must be mended, Algie."

"But they won't mend any more. The sides are worn away and the heels are off. Mamma says they will not. And I am ashamed of my clothes, all the fellows look at them so."

I cannot buy him any shoes to-day. Perhaps by night I may have some luck. I have told him to remain at home. Shabby, and shoeless, and made game of! My poor boy, who in my once-fond hopes was destined for Eton!

There's a man advertised for in this morning's papers: to copy deeds in his own house, at so much per folio. I shall hasten to town and go after it.

Thursday night.—Again no money. A shilling or two for the pressing wants of the hour, and that is all. Algernon must still remain at home. A knock at the door. Eugh! how I shiver to hear those knocks! Oh—the schoolmaster has sent his compliments, and wishes to know why Master Grainger was not at school. An excuse to be made there.

I went after the copying and had my usual luck. They had made arrangements, and did not require me.

Margaret says she has had a wretched day. One or two pressing creditors have called, and been loud and angry; Algernon, boy-like, has been worrying and troublesome; and Jemima, the old servant who has clung to us in our misfortunes, partly from affection, partly because we have not had it in our power to pay and discharge her, has been in one of her evil tempers, finding fault with everything, and reproaching Margaret with the non-payment of her wages. Poor Jemima! she works well; washing and everything falls to her; and in her better moods she asks if I think she will leave her poor mistress to battle with it all; but when her temper breaks out, there is

no bearing the house. No peace indoors, no peace without. What a life is ours!

Tuesday evening.—Two events—if events they can be called—have occurred to me. During the few minutes I could obtain a glance at the *Times*, I saw recorded there the death of Charles Anderson. He died at his vicarage, it said, after a long illness. Poor fellow! I should like to have seen him once more. We were good friends once. But he was one of those of whom, in my sanguine folly, I borrowed money during the floating of the Great Trebeddon scheme, and I was never able to return it. It was not very much—fifteen pounds—but it was much to *him*. From him, as from many others, for the same reason, I have been obliged to hide myself in shame. What will Mary Anderson do now? They cannot have saved money, and she has no other home. Oh, if I were but at my ease, as I once was, what delight should I not take in extending a helping hand to those friends whom adversity overtakes!

The other event was a meeting with George Little. He turned out of Queen Street as I was going down Cheapside. We had not met since the break-up years ago. At first he did not know me: I am changed, he says. Little has been abroad almost ever since; latterly in Austria, where some great scheme for

fortune-making that he has had in hand, has just come to grief. He divided with me what he had in his pocket—thirty-four shillings: all he had left, he observed in confidence, after paying his steerage passage to America, for which country he is starting. Will he ever do any good, I wonder, at anything? And yet, how honest and good-hearted and energetic he is! But he cannot settle down to steady things: he *must* speculate. I asked him to come down here with me—would not have minded his seeing our poor home and the straits to which we are reduced. But he had to embark at Gravesend this afternoon.

“I should like to have seen him,” observed Margaret just now, when I told her of this. “Is he much altered?”

“Not at all. And his spirits are quite as high as ever.”

“And poor Charles Anderson! Oh, Adam, how these things bring back the old days to us!”

“They do that! Margaret, I fear Mary Anderson will be badly off now. I am sure they could have laid nothing by.”

My wife did not reply. She was in the old low chair by the window, her head bent on her hand. The moonlight, streaming in, touched her brown hair, for we were sitting without light. Still no answer.

“What are you thinking of, Margaret?”

"Of what you will laugh at me for, Adam."

"Laugh! My laughing days are over."

"For what you have laughed at me for, times and again. Nay, Adam, in spite of your strong man's sense, of your ridicule, it will always be to me as one of those unfathomable things that never explain themselves."

"What will be?"

"That curious fortune told me by Mrs. Dale. You must acknowledge that it came true to the letter."

"It was just an accidental coincidence."

"Yes, I know you will always say so. Others would no doubt say the same. To me it means something more. Accidental, or not accidental, it was strange, Adam. The terrible reverses she spoke of fell upon us. The long dark lane on which we were to enter was to have no outlet, no ending. It has neither. And oh, how long we have been in it!"

I did not answer. The last words were true enough. Margaret was catching her breath with a sobbing sigh.

"When Mrs. Dale had told all she had to tell, she asked if I would like to wish. I wished that the ill which she had just promised me might not come true. The cards told me I should not have my wish. And I did not."

"It was but nonsense, Margaret. Childish pastime."

"All the same, I shall never forget it."

To end the subject, for these past reminiscences make her more sad than she need be, I told Margaret of my project of applying to Lewis. She caught at it in quite an over-sanguine manner; thinks Lewis cannot refuse; wonders I never thought of it before.

"You have never asked him for any before, have you, Adam?"

"No, never."

June. Monday morning.—Another month has come in; the sweetest month, as some think, in all the year. What will it bring for me?

Yesterday we had a good dinner; good and plentiful. How sincerely I thanked God in my heart when we sat down to it, He alone can tell. The paraded formal grace usually offered up, how much of lively thankfulness does that contain? Ah, we must undergo the pangs of hunger, continued, repeated, daily-recurring hunger, ere we can understand the gratitude due to Heaven for its bounteous supply of daily food. In prosperity, we give not a thought to it.

There is another thing many of us never give a thought to: the great amount of time we waste. People are apt to consider it "good time" if they get down to breakfast by nine o'clock. Suppose, instead, they rose at seven; no untoward hour; they would

add more than seven hundred hours to their lives yearly. How much would it add to a life of three score years and ten? Come, ye calculators! Shall we be called upon to account for this loss of time, when the day of remedy is gone by? I was once supine as the rest: latterly, I have been up earlier than most people. I assume no credit for it. I toss and turn on my uneasy bed, and am glad to leave it.

I sometimes catch myself envying the street beggars, for they at least have not an appearance to keep up. How is it that some people seem to bask away their lives in flowers and sunshine? From the cradle to the grave, their path never seems to be overshadowed by adversity. Yet, it may be that they have some secret sorrow: an ugly skeleton in the closet: all the more consuming from the very concealment it has to observe to the world.

Monday night.—Lewis is out of town. Will not be back till next Monday. How shall I tide over the week between now and then?

Thursday.—Algernon's master planned an excursion for his scholars, to spend to-day in the country; a treat before they break up for the midsummer holidays. Each boy to contribute a shilling, the master finding the rest. They have just filed by the window,

all but Algernon, with eager steps and faces of pleasure. The boys asked him yesterday if his friends could not *afford* the shilling. We could not afford it : small as the sum was, I had it not yesterday nor to-day to give. And his clothes ! how could he join those well-dressed boys ? He peeped at them from behind the curtain, and when they had passed sat down and burst into tears. I glanced at Margaret : her eyes were swimming ; and I, a strong man, could have wept too. What insignificant trifles these would appear to the world ! but they tell upon the already sorely-stricken heart.

My patient children ! sharing no amusement that others enjoy—living upon hard fare—exposed to witness the pains and degradations of poverty, the strife of reduced gentility ! But not a murmur at their privations crosses their young lips.

How I shall pay the school bill, I know not. Algernon will have to stay at home, as he did last half-year.

Sometimes the idea of emigration crosses my mind. But we can't do even that without money. And I might be no more successful in another country than I am here. If it be that God is punishing me for my folly, I suppose I should not be. I do believe that our conduct, whether it be good or bad, comes back to us : that we reap what we sow. There may be ex-

ceptions, but the rule is a very general one. People have but to look out in the world during a long series of years, and note and mark it.

Monday.—Monday has come round again, and I begin the week in hope. How shall I end it? To-day I go to Lewis. Knock, knock, knock! I must put them off again. I trust for a day or two only.

Friday night.—Thank Heaven for the hope this day has brought forth! I could not see Lewis till this morning: he was still out of town. He received me cordially. I explained all my circumstances to him, and asked for the loan of a hundred pounds. He said cheerfully that he would consider of it, and see what he could do. Saturday, the next day, he should be very busy, but I might go in and see him on Monday morning. I feel sure of the money now: if it were not his intention to lend it, he would have declined at once. Thank God! thank God!

Saturday night.—What an evening this has been! I have told them to call on Monday night or Tuesday morning, when they shall, I hope, be paid.

Monday night, 12 o'clock, P.M.—The clocks are tolling the knell of the departed day: would they

were tolling it for me! I cannot much longer support this wretched existence. Despair and disappointment, disappointment and despair:

I was at Lewis's by ten o'clock, and waited some minutes before he came in, minutes to me of unutterable agitation. A refusal I dared not contemplate: *yet, a refusal came.* He had consulted his partner, he said, who was not willing to advance the loan: had I been able to propose a responsible security for its repayment, they might have entertained it. And I had told this man all my situation! this man who, independently of his large yearly gains, is worth thousands! To have given me hopes on Friday! To make my request to him a matter of business! Friendship such as ours has been!

And I have walked about this day foodless, and I have come home penniless, and dead beat both in body and mind. To-morrow must come. I promised to pay them, and they will all be here thick and threefold.

I can no longer bear up against my fate. My children, my wife look to me for succour, and I cannot give it. There is one thought always pressing itself upon my brain—that, if I were no more, friends would rally around my wife and children. I have asked myself how this thought dares to come to me, and I have hitherto thrust it away; but I will do so no

longer. It is the only course open to me.—Margaret is calling to know what I am sitting up for.

Tuesday evening.—The last of my existence.—Father! Thou withholdest Thy mercy from me in this world, but surely Thou wilt not in the next. Pardon, pardon, if I come home to Thee before my time! I can no longer support this life; my persecutions are greater than I can bear. Surely sufferings such as mine never fell on man! My prayers have ascended in vain. I have implored for succour, and Thou answerest not. Not for wealth and luxury: a morsel of bread, a drink of water, a roof to cover us, *and peace*. And this not in idleness: I would work for it from the rising of the sun until its going down. Others can find means for subsistence, but I cannot. It is a curse that is upon me.

That Thou hast abandoned me is too sure; or in this, the last depths of my despair, there would steal to me a glimmering of hope. I have prayed for strength, for comfort, and it comes not to me. Oh! Thou, who readest all hearts, Thou readest mine, and Thou seest how I am driven to Thee. Forgive me this last act! Jesus, supplicate for me! I come, I come. Father, Father! reject me not for ever.

CHAPTER III.

A DREAM FROM HEAVEN.

ADAM GRAINGER was alone in his sitting-room. An ugly weapon of polished steel lay at his elbow, which he had brought down from his bed-chamber. He was writing the words that conclude the last chapter when a knock at the house-door was heard, and then his wife entered the room, a couple of bottles in her hand. He had deemed himself secure from interruption, and he started like a detected criminal, as he threw his pocket-handkerchief over the razor.

"Adam," cried his wife, "here's a curious thing! The Claytons have sent us a present of some brandy."

"Claytons!" echoed Mr. Grainger. "Who are the Claytons?"

"The people who live at Lime Villa: that beautiful house higher up. I was talking to Mrs. Clayton the other day about her plants and flowers. She has seen me standing to admire them through the gate, and we have struck up a speaking acquaintanceship."

"Very strange! Why should the people send brandy to us?"

"It does seem strange, but there can be no mistake. Their man-servant brought it, with his master's com-

pliments to Mr. and Mrs. Grainger, and begged they would use these two bottles of French brandy. I heard that Mr. Clayton was a large West-End wine-merchant. We will open one to-night."

"I tell you there must be a mistake, Margaret. Strangers are not likely to send brandy to me."

"Oh, Adam, they are kind-looking people: who knows but they may have an idea that we are in need? I know it is all right."

"My dear, the world is not so romantic."

Mrs. Grainger left the room, taking with her one of the bottles. He hoped she was gone for some time, and turned to his journal to write a word of farewell to her.

The clocks have just chimed nine: in ten minutes, Margaret, your husband will have ceased to exist. My love, my wife, forgive me! and you *will*, for you alone know how wretched has been my existence. Algernon! Isabel! Caroline! Walter! obey your mother in all things; and, when you grow up, cherish and support her better than I have been able to do. I would steal upstairs and kiss farewell to you in your unconscious slumber, but that my heart-strings would break with the effort. Margaret, when they are of an age to hear it, pray to them to forgive their father: tell them it was for them, for you, that his sufferings

became unbearable. Alone in the world he could have borne and braved all. God bless you all! Margaret, my only love, farewell for ever!

At this moment Mrs. Grainger suddenly returned to the room, several things in her hands.

"Look here, Adam, I have broken the cork in. That's the fault of the fork. What a great many things we shall want when we go into real house-keeping again! Had any one offered me a present of a corkscrew this morning, I should have declined it as having no use for one."

"Why, what are you going to do?" he asked. "What's that hot water for?"

"To make some brandy-and-water. I boiled it up on some of Jemima's wood: she had put it ready to light the fire in the morning. We shall relish our supper of dry bread now, but it was terribly dry before. We must dispense with sugar, Adam."

"I don't want any brandy-and-water," he returned, speaking irritably, for he was vexed at these interruptions. "I have some writing to do, and wish to be alone."

"Do your writing to-morrow. We will keep festival to-night. It is not often we have French brandy to keep it on. What a treat after our wretched day!"

"I never knew before that you cared for brandy-and-water, Margaret."

"Oh, Adam, you know I never have. But in our reduced condition, our need of nourishment, it seems like a godsend. I think I can understand how it is that the poor so often take to drinking. Their physical need induces it."

Something called her again from the room. In his infatuation he determined not to lose a moment. He lifted the handkerchief, and grasped the razor. Still not in time, for her hand was heard too soon on the handle of the door. He dashed the dangerous weapon back again with a muttered word; it might have been a curse; and, taking up the brandy-bottle, shook it about and pretended to be looking through it; anything to hide his confusion, coward that he was. She happened to glance at him, as she set down the glasses and a plate of bread, and was startled.

"Adam! how strange you look! Quite wild. Are you ill?—feverish?"

"I think I am," he groaned, relinquishing the bottle, and pressing his hands upon his temples.

"The brandy-and-water will do you good. Make it, please. It is all ready."

"Do you give brandy for fever, Margaret?"

"Yes, for such fever as yours; which arises from want of support. Make it at once, or the water will get cold."

He rose mechanically, and it is probable that his shaking hand may have poured more brandy than he intended into both glasses. Mrs. Grainger silently added additional water to hers after tasting it: but he drank his. Suddenly she burst into laughter. He looked up reprovingly; her gay mood so jarred upon his nerves.

"Adam, I can't help it. I was thinking suppose the man should come for the brandy again. How foolish we should look!"

"You are merry to-night!"

"I am so pleased at our delicious supper. I wish Jemima had not gone to bed, I would take her some; but she has had a hard day's work and was very tired. And for it to come so unexpectedly! We never know what things may turn up."

"Or, one hour what the next may bring forth."

She talked on, thankful to cast aside care for one brief moment; but he only chafed at her sitting there with him. The cordial had warmed him, had soothed his broken spirit, and he leaned back in his chair, almost in enjoyment, but his fatal resolution abated not one jot of its force. Hoping to drive her from the room, he kept silence, and at last shut his eyes and feigned sleep. It succeeded, for she left the room. And now, at last, the opportunity was come.

He rose upright in his chair, determined not again

to lose it. Yet he did pause for an instant or two. His thoughts were turning to chaos: all things of the past seemed to be before his sight; and, yet, nothing. He stood on the confines of this life, on the threshold of Eternity: one minute more, and he would have entered on its mysteries for ever. *Eternity! . . . for ever! . . . his own act!*


He made an effort to rid himself of the thoughts that were crowding on him. He untied his neckcloth, and it fell to the ground. Even in the last moment he was conscious of this, and picked it up again.

He was sick at heart. Suspense, dread, fear, overwhelmed him, shaking him with agony as one in convulsion. Yet, with all this, there was no repenting, no turning from his self-willed doom. "Now or never!" he muttered; "if I hesitate I am lost."

Lost!

Throwing aside the handkerchief, he took up what was under it. He raised his hand. One convulsive shudder, and Adam Grainger's spirit was in the other world.

But to what had he hastened? Oh, horror, horror! The pen cannot write it; words cannot utter it; living, waking beings cannot imagine it. Mercy, mercy upon him and all such! Fellow-creatures, cease not, cease never to supplicate for these mistaken outcasts! They were pilgrims like ourselves, known and dear to many



of us, living in hope here, waiting for a Hereafter: it was but a moment's rashness, a moment's despair, yet one that we are taught forfeits heaven. Oh if we might but strive to atone for them! we, who still have the privilege of praying, of supplicating, would pray for them untiringly, unceasingly! The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

To be dead, and yet alive: to be in the next world, yet awake to what was passing in this: surrounded by woe unutterable, and hope gone for ever! Oh fool, fool! he had talked, in life, of "despair," of "hope deserting him;" the film had fallen from his eyes now. As a grain of sand to the desert, a drop of water to the ocean, was the duration of his mortal existence in comparison with Eternity. And he had refused to encounter its short-lived trials: he had shrunk from the insignificant frowns of the race around him, suffering, weak, finite beings like himself, and rushed into the presence of his outraged Creator. Did he think to gain heaven by his mad exit? What *had* he gained? Oh, short-sighted man! Most miserable!

Adam Grainger had passed by his own act from time to Eternity; and the wide flood-gates of retribution were thrown back, and the waters of repentance came rushing on to his soul. He writhed and struggled with the torrent; but on, on it came, and surrounded him. Repentance such as we can feel—what was it

to his? He strove to tear himself in his anguish, to curse himself for his rash presumption, to howl aloud in his sharp torment; *but he dared not kneel and pray to God*; he might not call upon his Saviour: he had forfeited that privilege for ever. He saw the crowds of angels, heavenly messengers, swift and sure, descending from God to man, bearing hope, and comfort, and succour on their wings. And alas! how short-sighted had been his wisdom! For, behold! there, at a little distance, was a bright cloud, no bigger than a speck, and he saw that it had been coming towards him, charged with relief and recompense. Now it was arrested on its way, and was vanishing into air, for he himself had rendered its mission futile.

He stood, in the spirit, in the chamber he had flown from and watched the people, neighbours and others, as they crowded in to view the form of clay, which he had cast aside: their comments, though whispered but in the heart, were loud enough to him. When the first shock of pity was past, dastard! wicked! were the best names they gave him. To desert his wife and children! to abandon them in their helplessness to a world which he had found so stern! His sons, wanting the guiding hand of a father, might grow up degraded men; his daughters—what in life he would not have dared to glance at. Woe, woe, unutterable

woe! Woe and torture upon his soul, by day and by night, until the hour of doom


The jury brought it in "Insanity." And, next, the scanty funeral left the house for the church, bearing the remains to the place where they would be left to moulder. *He* followed in its wake. He saw, now, the utter mockery of the pomp and pride sometimes made to attend the dead. The *courriers en avant*, as we say of other shows, carrying aloft their distinguishing batons; the decorated heads of the stately horses; the velvet trappings sweeping the ground; the majestic plumes rising over the death-coach; the train of attendants; carriages and feathers and trappings, carriages and feathers and trappings still again, a long line of them; a coffin emblazoned with sufficient silver to tempt the cupidity of the living, whilst what it contains, that for which the show is made, is more loathsome than anything above the earth or below it. But where is the spirit? Following, as he was.

The curate read the service for the dead: little fear that any higher dignitary would attend to bury such as he. "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of His great mercy to take unto Himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust: in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life——"

He tore about the church and churchyard in dire anguish—we cannot picture such; he would have screamed aloud, but that sound was denied him; he would have dashed himself with frantic violence against the gravestones. All in vain. Until the Day of Judgment, his punishment was confined to mental torture; afterwards—— In his convulsive throes he swept by Algernon; and the boy shuddered and sobbed. Was he conscious that some blighting influence had passed him?

Oh, that he could undo his work!—that he could undo his work! He had talked of “tasting the quiet of the grave.” There was no grave. The body he had cast off lay in the grave; not the spirit.

The space around was of awful immensity, beyond human comprehension; its colour a dull, gloomy leaden. On its confines appeared a glimmering of shining light, telling of the realms he had lost, and of Him who made their brightness: and whenever his vision encountered that spot, a dreadful fear shattered him, such as we can only experience in a dream. The living God was there; the God whom he had rejected; and he knew that he must yet be brought before Him for judgment. But not yet; not, as it seemed, for ages; and, until then, he was doomed to whirl unceasingly about, this horrible remorse tearing at his heart-strings. But it appeared that some power was



impelling him towards that bright spot now. He struggled to resist; to bear back. No: nearer and nearer it urged him. "It is not time," he screamed; "it is not time!" And with a yell, as of madness, he—awoke.

He awoke. These horrors, which had visited Adam Grainger, were but a dream. When he had leaned his head back in his chair to feign sleep, hoping so to get rid of the presence and remarks of his wife, sleep had indeed mercifully overtaken him.

The large drops of agony stood upon his brow. He shook, as with an ague, from head to foot. He was still in uncertainty: was all *that* real, or had he indeed not lost heaven? Mrs. Grainger, who had been watching him in his sleep, came forward.

"Margaret! Margaret!" he hoarsely gasped, "which is reality? Am I here by your side, a living man?"

"I don't know what can have been the matter with you," she answered. "You fell asleep soon after taking the brandy-and-water, and I think you must have had a troubled dream—a nightmare. You have been so much disturbed in it; and you woke with a positive scream."

He shook and shivered still, staring in affright. Not yet could he take in the mercy which had been vouchsafed him.

"And, Adam, look here. I took up your handker-

chief to throw over your head, and there lay your razor. What did you bring it down for?"

"Margaret, that razor——"

He looked at her, and stopped for utterance. The truth flashed upon her mind, and she cried out with a wild cry, as she threw herself on her knees before him.

"Oh, Adam! what frightful project is this? We have borne much; we can bear more; we will bear all. *I can, whilst you are left to me.*"

But he was now weeping tears of relieved agony, thankful for the dreadful vision which had saved him.

"You have destroyed my peace of mind," she wailed. "With this fear hanging over me, I shall never know another moment's rest."

"I was about to destroy myself, Margaret," he whispered; "I avow it now. And God has saved me by a dream—nay, a vision. I thought I had done it; and the horrors——"

He stopped, and shivered again. She clasped him tightly.

"Tell it me, Adam."

"I cannot tell it you. No human words could convey an impression of its awful terrors. But it has saved my soul."

"You will bear all in future, as you have done,

without a thought of lifting your hand against yourself?" she implored. "You promise me?"

"Ay, Margaret; bear all, and welcome all. No matter what it may be, it will seem to me like heaven, after that which I have escaped from. How long did I sleep?"

"Half-an-hour."

"Only half-an-hour!" he echoed. "All that dread horror in half-an-hour!"

"Adam," she said, in a low voice, "this must have been a fearful dream."

"Ay. Although it came from God."

CHAPTER IV.

THE RAY OF BRIGHTNESS.

It was close upon ten o'clock. Adam Grainger was still sitting back in his chair, lost in the reminiscence of his wonderful dream, when a knock was heard at the street-door. Margaret went to answer it. She came back, looking scared.

"Oh, Adam, the words I spoke in jest are true. The man has come for the brandy."

"Who is he?"

"It was brought here by mistake, he says. A

family named Grainger, friends of his master's, have just moved into a house close by, and that's where he ought to have taken the brandy, their own cellar not being yet come. What shall we do?"

"Sit down, Margaret, and make your mind easy. I will speak to the man."

"But how embarrassing for you?"

"My dear wife, nothing will ever appear embarrassing to me again. What I have gone through this night has rendered all things light to me here. I shall never more shrink from a fellow-creature."

Mr. Grainger went out to the waiting servant, returned to him the one unopened bottle, and gave him a message to deliver to his master and mistress, to the effect that he would call and explain on the morrow.

It is probable that few men can realize the wonderful relief to Adam Grainger that this dream had brought. To have been rescued—as he looked upon it—from eternal death, and with the dreadful scenes still fresh upon him—the heaven he had forfeited, the condemnation he had invoked, living yet in his mind as vivid pictures—it could not be but that his whole soul should be filled with one unbounded glow of thankfulness and joy. None can tell what his sensations were; for none, let us suppose, can have gone through the same experience and been snatched from destruction as he had been.

"God has had a favour to me, and has saved me from myself, saved me for Life everlasting," he kept mentally repeating as he lay in bed that night. "Oh, how can any ever doubt Him! There need never be such a thing as despair in this world, if we do but trust to Him. I see it now. I shall see it ever as long as my days last."

Towards morning he got to sleep: and slept better and more soundly than he had for years. There was no more hope of earthly prosperity, so far as he could see, than there had been; nevertheless his mind felt at peace. A new phase of life seemed to have dawned for Adam Grainger.

It was eight o'clock when he awoke. Eight o'clock. He could hardly remember when he had slept beyond daylight. Margaret was up, and downstairs; and he could hear the children in the garden and Jemima's cross tones as she called to them from the kitchen-window. Could it all be true, he asked himself, as he folded his hands before rising to dress; could all that mercy and blessing have been accorded him? Was he still here, a living being, instead of—what he had been eager to become? the dead man, dead and lost, he had looked upon in his dream.

"Because He had a favour to me!" reverently repeated Adam Grainger.

But though their supper had been unexpectedly

augmented by help from without, their breakfast was not. Adam and his wife sat down to plain bread and weak tea. The children had bread-and-milk, plentifully diluted with water.

"Adam, you will have to go about that brandy," said his wife as he rose from breakfast.

"I am going now, Margaret."

Accordingly, he betook himself to Lime Villa. And upon entering the gate, he fell almost into the arms of an elderly gentleman, who was standing without his hat by the side of Mrs. Clayton; a gentleman who was evidently quite at home, and finding fault with something that did not please his taste in the arrangement of the flower-beds. Recognition was mutual. Adam knew him at once for Mr. Phelps, the director in the insurance company. The old insurance company that had once had him, Adam, for its chief clerk, or actuary; which valuable post he had thrown up in his insane mania for mining speculation.

"I thought it must be you," said Mr. Phelps, holding out his hand. "When my niece here—with whom I come to stay a few days sometimes—spoke of a Mr. and Mrs. Grainger living in a small cottage hard by, something told me it was no other than you and your wife. Well, and how did the Great Trebeddon Mine finally turn out?"

Adam strove to answer calmly. But, what with

the half-mocking question (though indeed only meant as a bit of harmless pleasantry), and the knowledge of how it had turned out and all it had brought him; what with the sight of Mr. Phelps, calling up memories of the past happy days and his bitter folly; and what with his depressed physical state, Adam fell into a little agitation. He began giving the best explanation he could about the brandy to Mrs. Clayton; but the colour changed on his refined face as he spoke, and his breath became short.

"And so you tapped it," interrupted Mr. Phelps, with a hearty laugh; "and quite right too. *I* wonder you sent back the other bottle. If any one left two bottles of the best French brandy at my door as a present, I should not expect them to be fetched away again. And now tell me how you are getting on," added the old director, passing his arm within Adam's to lead him about the garden for a chat, whilst Mrs. Clayton went indoors. "You don't look over strong,"—with a side glance at the worn but still attractive face.

A moment's debate with himself, and Adam put pride in his pocket and told him how. Told the whole truth. That he was not getting on at all; had never got on since he threw up his place, but had gone gradually downwards, so that often he and his had literally wanted bread,

"Ay," said Mr. Phelps. "It's just what those mining schemes, and other similar delusions, often bring a man to. Has it cured you of speculating, Grainger?"

"Cured me!" repeated Adam, with unnecessary emphasis. "I would rather take a clerkship at a hundred a-year, though I knew I should have no rise from it in life, than embark in the best speculation that was ever set afloat. I have a *horror* of speculation now, sir."

"You regret your post with us, I suppose?"

Adam Grainger turned away his face. The remark told on his stricken heart. Of all the mistaken actions in his past life, the throwing up of that post was the one that brought him most remorse, the one he could least bear to recall.

"Would you like to come back to us?" asked the old gentleman, detecting the emotion, and breaking a somewhat long silence.

Adam Grainger turned his head, half startled at the word. "*Sir?*"

"I don't see why you shouldn't, Grainger. To tell the truth, we have never been so well suited, since you left us. Smith, who succeeded you, came into a fortune, and threw up the post; and Macpherson, who came after him, has got into an unsettled state—through some notion that he shall do better in Australia, where his brothers are—and into bad habits

besides. Drinks, in fact. At a meeting of the board yesterday, it was determined to discharge him."

Adam Grainger could not speak. The vista opening to him, uncertain though it yet was, took away all power.

"I don't promise it you absolutely," went on Mr. Phelps. "I must speak to the directors first. But I think I can arrange it. I am chairman, now poor Gatherby's gone, you know; and a great deal lies with me. There's no one would do for us so well as you. But mind, Grainger: you wouldn't begin again at twelve hundred a-year. Macpherson has only nine."

Adam Grainger turned. His face was working, his trembling hands took those of old Mr. Phelps, and his voice was broken with emotion, as he strove to say what the suggested hope was to him. The tears were running down his cheeks.

"Well, well, we'll see," said the kind old director, coughing down some feeling of his own. "I don't undertake to promise it at once; but—we will see. Suppose you look in at the office in three or four weeks' time: there'll be no change made before then. Or, stay: give me your address, and I will write and tell you when to call."

The tone and words bore their full assurance to the listener, and Adam Grainger felt as certain that the wonderful re-instalment would take place, the former

forfeited prosperity be his again, as though he had that moment held it in his hand. And he knew that this was the one ray of brightness, that he had seen on its way to him in the dream.

The old place again. Adam Grainger, who had tidied over the recent three or four weeks of expectancy he hardly knew how, sat looking at it whilst he waited, for the clerks told him that Mr. Phelps was engaged just then with some of the other directors. The same maps upon the walls; the same stools and chairs; the same desks and the same number of clerks at them. Some of the clerks had been there when he was, and began talking to him of this and that.

"The chairman is at liberty now, Mr. Grainger."

Adam rose and went to the board-room, passing on the left of the passage the smaller room that had once been *his*. Would it be his again?

"Well, Grainger, we have been talking over this matter," was the greeting of the chairman; who was now alone. "It is the first time that we have met for business since I saw you: several of the directors have been out of town."

"Yes, sir," replied Adam, in a low tone of emotion: for indeed he was only too conscious how much was at stake, and what the next few moments might make or mar.

"And we have decided to give you another trial. I heartily believe we can't do better than take you back; and so I told them."

No answer. Mr. Phelps heard something like a sob or a sigh; and that was all.

"I assured them that you wouldn't get speculating again: that you had had a sickener. That's true, is it not?"

"More than true," said Adam, in a strangely earnest tone. "Never again."

"Well, I have answered for you. You are to come back here to your old post, and to enter on it next Monday morning—which will be the second of the month, you know. Macpherson leaves on Saturday. He is going off at once to Australia, and prefers to dispense with the usual notice."

Adam was standing by one of the high-backed, carved board chairs. Leaning on it, as it seemed. His face looked very pale, and he kept silence.

"You begin again at nine hundred a-year. Will that do?"

"Do!" echoed Adam, his emotion breaking out at last. "To me it sounds like riches incalculable—far more so than that delusive mine ever seemed, golden though I thought it. Oh, sir, how can I ever thank you for what you have done?"

"Well, well, I suppose you have experienced some

straits," said the good-hearted old man. "You will serve us well in future, I know. And look here, Grainger—would you like to borrow a trifle from me?—privately, you understand. Your first instalment of salary won't be due for three months yet. Perhaps you need it?"

How he needed it, a sobbing sigh betrayed. In truth, Adam Grainger saw not in what way he and his family were to obtain bread until the salary came in. Tradespeople had been paid with promises so long, that all credit was at an end.

Mr. Phelps was tugging at a pocket-book, which obstinately stuck in his side pocket. "I have a blank cheque in it," he said, when he had got the book out. "What shall I make it out for, Grainger? Fifty? Will that do?"

"Oh yes. I know not how to thank you, sir."

"You can repay me, you know, when you draw your salary. There. It's not crossed. You can step round to the bank and present it."

Adam Grainger took the cheque and the donor's hands together. He did not speak: but old Mr. Phelps thought he had never seen any countenance show equal signs of past, prolonged suffering, and of present emotion.

"And I doubted God's mercy," he said to himself as he went out.

Margaret turned foolish. When she saw the money that night; the actual gold in her husband's hands; she laughed and cried by turns like a child.

"I don't think it can be real, Adam."

"That's what I have been thinking at odd moments ever since I left the city. The money is real; feel it, Margaret; and so is the post to which I return on Monday."

"Do you believe such luck ever fell on any one before? Do you think God was ever so good?"

"Hush, Margaret. He is all goodness. It is past finding out."

With twenty pounds in her hands to dispose of, Margaret Grainger felt the next morning half bewildered. As she went out to pay off a portion of their most pressing debts amidst the tradesmen of the neighbourhood, it seemed to her as if some one must come and claim the money out of her purse before she could reach the shops, and say to her, "It was all a mistake of your husband's: this gold is not yours; it must be given back to me."

But oh, it turned out to be very real. She said to the butcher and the baker, "I have come to pay you part of your account; and in three months' time from this, if not before, the whole of it shall be paid: and in future we shall not need to ask for credit." They believed her, and were civil and obliging: for Mar-

garet was one of those who carry truth in their faces. And she ventured, considering how poor their fare had been of late, to order in a leg of mutton for dinner that day. A whole leg, which Jemima stared at, and made great haste to put to the fire, lest the butcher-boy should come running back for it again and say he had left it at the wrong house—like the brandy. For, when tradespeople have long been suspicious, and the credit, given, has been none, one cannot get into the belief at once that bread and meat may be had for the asking.

"Our troubles are coming to an end, Jemima," Mrs. Grainger had taken occasion to whisper to her that morning. "Your master is to have his old place again."

"I shall believe it when I see it, ma'am," said crusty, incredulous Jemima. "Master have had enough places in his head of late years; but they all drop through."

"And when I come in I shall be able to give you two or three pounds off your back wages, Jemima. It's all true."

The tradespeople visited, Margaret looked at the money left in her hand. A pair of boots *must* be had for Algernon: but—might she venture to buy some for the other children? They wanted them badly enough. With some trepidation she bought a pair for

Isabel: and she bought two or three other necessary articles, apart from food, that they had managed, she hardly knew how, to do without. Margaret Grainger's recent experiences had been so keen, her economy of necessity so painful, that she would never again be lavish of money. At present she had it not in any great amount to be lavish with; for this fifty pounds, though seeming riches, appeared to have at least fifty outlets calling for it; and it was all they had to depend upon for three months to come. Adam had now gone round to carry a quarter's rent to the landlord of their cottage, just to keep him quiet: for they had latterly lived in fear of being turned out: and to assure him that for the future, so long as they remained in the cottage, the rent would be paid regularly.

"New clothes I must have," Adam had observed to his wife, when they were apportioning out the funds. "But I think my former tailor will supply them on credit, when he knows that I am back in my old post again."

And so, the ray of brightness, which Adam Grainger had seen in his dream, had reached them, bringing succour upon its wings; succour, and healing, and hope.

CHAPTER V.

SUNSHINE.

A FEW years had gone by. The former troubles were of the past. Prosperity and peace reigned again. And, of all living people, none could be so humble-hearted, so earnest-minded, so anxious to bend their steps heavenward, and to extend a helping hand to any who might be in affliction, as were Adam and Margaret Grainger.

On the sunny lawn of their new, and nice, and pleasant home, but under the shade of the clustering trees that bordered it, they were sitting this summer's afternoon with their four children. The children had returned home that day for the holidays and were showing their prizes.

"Walter has done the best of all," said Mr. Grainger. "Don't you think so, Margaret?"

"Walter! Why, papa—why, mamma—he has only three prizes, and I have five."

"Yes, Master Algernon; but remember you are six years older than he."

"He is not half so much up in English and French, even for a junior, as I am in classics," returned

Master Algernon, consequentially. "Look at Isabel's, papa."

"I have seen Isabel's. She has done well. But what about Carry's? Where are hers?"

"I think it may be as well for you not to inquire after Carry's," interposed Mrs. Grainger.

"Why, Carry! Do you mean to confess that you have earned none?"

"Oh, papa!—if they had given a prize for dancing, I should have gained that."

"She is always dancing," cried Isabel. "She cares for nothing but dancing and laughing."

"Well, well, they are appropriate to childhood," mused Adam. "Care will come in time."

Carry danced up to her mother. "Mamma, Jemima says some one's coming here on a visit to-morrow, and she won't tell us who; she tells us to guess. Will *you* tell us?"

Mrs. Grainger smiled and nodded. "Some one that I shall like to have very much, Carry; and you will, too. Miss Anderson."

"And will she stay with us all through the holidays?"

"I dare say she will. I hope so."

Two servants appeared, bearing some choice fruit and cakes, which they placed on the table before their master and mistress. "Oh, what a nice treat!"

exclaimed Caroline. "Is that to welcome us home from school?"

"Children, sit down and enjoy it," said their father. "This day is the anniversary of an eventful era in my life, and I would keep it as one of thanksgiving."

"What event was it?" asked the children.

"One by which I was in great peril."

"Peril of your life, papa?" inquired the eldest boy.

"Yes, Algernon, in peril of my life."

"And who saved you?"

"One who will save all who apply to Him."

"Ah, you mean God. Tell us about it, papa."

"It is not of a nature fitted for your years. You shall hear it when you are men and women."

"Did mamma know it?"

"Mamma did."

"And is it a year ago to-day?"

"It is several years ago."

"I know," cried the dancing Carry: who simply would *not* sit still. "Papa was run over."

"No, Caroline, I was not run over. I think you stand most chance of encountering that calamity, if you fly about so heedlessly. You are dancing now."

"Papa, I expect it was during the time we were so poor. How very poor we were! You don't remember much about it," added Algernon, turning to his brothers and sisters.

"I do," said Isabel.

"Ay, children, many's the morning I have got up, and did not know where to get you a bit of bread. Give me your hands, dear children, and listen to me. I am about to speak to you very seriously, and I must request you never to forget my words. You have spoken, Algernon, of the poverty we were in, but you cannot understand half its misery, half its embarrassment. It lasted so long that I rashly concluded I was forgotten by God: my heart, crushed with misery and wearied out, was almost broken, my spirit quite. I was tempted to abandon all; to—to"—here he placed a hand upon his temples—"to abandon you, my children; but a singular event showed me my error, and led me to better thoughts. I no longer imagined I *could not* bear any ill which might be my lot, but resolved *to do so*, and I found that this resolution took away half its hardship. I recalled one of the promises your mamma has often read to you, which I had chosen to forget—that, as our day is, so, if we will it, shall our strength be. From that time I no longer gave way to despair, but struggled on, doing my very best in trust and hope. It was not very long, after that, that I had to struggle. God's merciful help was on its way to me then. And—you see, my children; you know how we have been brought through sorrow and sadness. We have re-

gained all we had lost, even former friends ; content, plenty, and peace are ours, and those dark days are remembered but as a tale that is told."

That these words of Adam Grainger, this true record of one man's life, could be read by all who, like him, feel tempted to believe they are abandoned of Heaven ! Oh ! let the would-be suicide remember them to his comfort, and *stay his hand*. Though his spirit be faint and weary, and his health shattered ; though hope has flown far away, and he looks around him, and finds no place, under the four winds of heaven, to turn to for comfort or rest, and so despair has laid hold upon him, and he seizes, in his madness, the fatal weapon that will end his woes in this life ; even at that last dread moment, LET HIM STAY HIS HAND. He knows not what an hour may bring forth ; what God's compassion may have in store for him.

GINA MONTANI.

GINA MONTANI.

PART THE FIRST.

I.

IN one of the sunniest spots of sunny Tuscany, that favoured department of Italy, may still be seen the ruins of a strong, ancient-built castle, or palace, surrounded by extensive grounds now run to waste ; and which was, a century or two ago, one of the proudest buildings in that balmy land.

It was on an evening of delicious coolness, there so coveted, that a cavalier issued on horseback from the gates of the castle, which was then at the acme of its pride and strength. Numerous retainers stood on either side by the drawbridge, their heads bared to the evening sun, until the horseman should have passed ; but he went forth unattended : and then the men resumed their caps, and swung-to the draw-

bridge, as he urged his horse to a quick pace. It was the lord of that stately castle, the young inheritor of the lands of Visinara. His form, tall and graceful, was bent occasionally to the very neck of his horse, in acknowledgment of the homage that was universally paid him, though he sat his steed proudly, as if conscious that such bearing befitted the descendant of one of Italia's noblest families. In years he had numbered scarcely more than a quarter of a century, and yet on his beautiful features might be traced a shade, which told of perplexity and care.

Turning down a narrow and not much frequented way which branched off from the main road, a mile or two distant from his residence, he at length came in view of one of those pretty places, partly mansion, partly cottage, and partly temple, at that period to be seen in Italy; but which we *now* meet with rarely, saving in pictures. Fastening the bridle of his charger to a tree, he walked towards the house, and passing down the colonnade which ran along the south side of it, entered one of the rooms through the open window.

A lady, young and beautiful, sat there alone. She had delicate features, and a fair, open countenance, the complexion of which resembled more that of an English than an Italian one, inasmuch as a fine, transparent colour was glowing on the cheeks. The expression of her eyes was mild and sweet, and her

hair, of a chestnut brown, fell in curls upon her neck, according to the fashion of the times. She started visibly at sight of the count, and her tongue gave utterance to words, but what she apparently knew not.

"So you have returned, signor?"

"At last, Gina," was the count's answer, as he stole his arm round her slender waist, and essayed to draw her affectionately towards him.

"Unhand me, Count di Visinara!" she impetuously exclaimed, moving away; and her whole form trembled with agitation.

He stood irresolute; aghast at the reception from her who was his early and dearest love.

"Are you out of your senses?" was his exclamation.

"No, but I soon shall be. Better for insanity to fall upon me, than experience the wretchedness of these last few days."

"My love, my love, what mean you?"

"*My love!* call you *me* your love, Count di Visinara! Be silent, hypocrite! I know you now. Cajoled that I have been in listening to you so long!"

"Gina!"

"And so the honourable Count di Visinara has amused his leisure hours in making love to Gina Montani!" she cried, vehemently. "The lordly chieftain who——"

"Be silent, Gina!" he interrupted. "Before you continue your strange accusations, tell me the origin of them. My love has never wandered from you."

"Yet you are seeking a wife in the heiress of Della Ripa!" was her quick retort. "Ah, Sir Count, your complexion changes now!"

Gina Montani was right: the flush of excitement on his face had turned to paleness.

"Your long and repeated journeys, for days together, are now explained," she continued. "It was well to tell me business took you from home."

"I have had business to transact with the Prince of Della Ripa," he replied, boldly, recovering his equanimity.

"And to combine business with pleasure," she answered, with a curl of her delicate lip, "you have been wont to linger by the side of his daughter."

"And what though I have sometimes seen the Lady Adelaide?" he rejoined. "I have no love for her."

Gina was silent awhile, as if struggling with her strong emotion, and then spoke calmly.

"My mother has enjoined me, times out of mind, not to suffer your continued visits here, for that you would never speak of marriage. You never will, Giovanni."

"Turn to my faith, Gina," he exclaimed, with emotion, "and I will marry thee to-morrow."

"They say you are about to marry Adelaide of Della Ripa," she replied, passing by his own words with a gesture.

"They deceive you, Gina."

"You deceive me," she answered, passionately; "you upon whose veracity I would have staked my life. And this is to be my reward!"

"You are like all your sex, Gina—when their jealousy is aroused, good-bye to reason. One and all are alike."

"Can you say that in this case my suspicions are unfounded?"

"Gina," he answered, as he once again would have drawn her to his heart, "let us not waste the hours in vain recriminations. *I have no love for Adelaide of Della Ripa.*"

He spoke with the emphasis of truth, and she suffered herself to believe him. How credulous is the heart of a woman when she loves!

They sat in the garden when the heat of the sun had passed; her hand in his, her ear bent to his honeyed words. In one sense they were true enough, those whispers, for his love was all hers: and once more they were happy together as of old.

But this was not to last. As the weeks and the months flew on, the visits of the count grew few and far between. He made long stays at the territory of

Della Ripa, and people told it as a fact, no longer disputable, that he was about to make a bride of the Lady Adelaide.

They had come strangers into Tuscany, the Signora Montani and her daughter, but a year or two before. The signora was in deep grief for the loss of her husband, she was also in ill health, and they lived the most secluded life, making no acquaintances. They were scarcely known by name or by sight; and, saving the Count di Visinara, no visitors were ever found there. The signora was of northern extraction, and of the Reformed faith, and had reared her daughter in the principles of the latter, which of itself would cause them to court seclusion, at that period, in Italy. And the Lord of Visinara, independent and haughty as he was by nature and by position, would not have dared to take Gina Montani to be his wedded wife.

II.

It was on a calm moonlight night that a closely-wrapped-up form stood in the deep shade of a grove of cypress-trees, within the gates of the Castle of Visinara, anxiously watching.

Parties passed and repassed, and the figure stirred not; but now there came one, the very echo of whose

footsteps had command in it, and the form advanced stealthily, and glided out of its hiding-place, right upon the path of the Lord of Visinara. He stood still, and faced the intruder.

"Who are you?—and what do you do here?"

"I came to bid you farewell, Sir Count; to wish you joy of your marriage!" And, throwing back the mantle and hood, Gina Montani's fragile form stood out to view.

"You here, Gina!"

"Ay; I have struggled long—long. Pride, resentment, jealousy—I have struggled fiercely with them; but all are forgotten in my unhappy love."

He drew her closely to him, as in their happy days.

"You depart to-morrow morning on your way to bring home your bride. I have seen your preparations—I have watched the movements of your retainers. No farewell was given me—no word offered of consolation—no last visit vouchsafed."

It would seem that he could not gainsay her words, for he made no reply.

"Know you how long it is since we met?" she continued; "how long——"

"Reproach me not," he interrupted. "I have suffered more than you. And, for a farewell visit, I did not dare to trust myself."

"And so this is to be the end of your enduring love,

that you said was to be mine, and only mine, until death!"

"And before Heaven I spoke the truth. I have never loved—I never shall love but you. Yet, Gina, what would you have me do? I may not speak to you of marriage; and it is necessary to my position that I wed."

"*She* is of your own rank, therefore you have wooed her?"

"And of my own faith. Difference of rank may be overcome; of faith, never."

"Oh, that the time had come when God's children shall be all of one mind, of one faith!" she uttered. "In later ages, this peace may be upon the earth."

"Would it were, Gina! Or that you and I had never met him!"

"What, do *you* wish it!" she retorted. "You, who voluntarily sever yourself from me!"

"I have acted an honourable part, Gina," he cried, striding to and fro, in his agitation.

"*Honourable*, did you say?"

"Ay, honourable. You were growing too dear to me, and I could not speak of marriage to you."

There was a long pause. She was standing against one of the cypress-trees, the moon, through an opening above, casting its light upon her pure face, down which were coursing tears of anguish.

"So henceforth we must be brother and sister," he whispered.

"Brother and sister," she repeated, in a moaning voice, pressing the cold tree against her aching temples.

"After awhile, Gina, when time shall have subdued our feelings. Until then we may not meet."

She was startled by the words into sudden pain. "Will you not come here? Shall we never see you here?"

"Nay, Gina, I must not do so great wrong to the Lady Adelaide."

"So great wrong!" she exclaimed, in amazement.

"Not real wrong, I am aware. But I shall undertake at the altar to love and cherish her; and though I cannot do the one, I will the other. Knowing that I cannot love her, I would be doubly careful of her feelings."

"I see, I see," interrupted the young lady, indignantly; "*her* feelings must be respected, whilst mine——"

"And for my own sake," he added, in a whisper.

"And my poor sick mother, to whom your visits have been as a balm? But I see: I see. Farewell, Giovanni."

"One word yet, Gina," he said, detaining her. "You will probably hear of me much—foremost in the chase, gayest in the ball-room, last at the banquet

—the gay, fortunate Lord of Visinara; and when you do so, remember that that gay lord wears about him a secret chain, suspected by and known to none—a chain, some links of which will remain entwined around his heart to his dying day, though the gilding that made it precious must from this time moulder away. Know you what the chain is, Gina?”

The suffocating sobs were rising in her throat, and she made no answer.

“*His love for you.* Fare thee well, my dearest and best. Nay, another instant; it is our last embrace in this world.”

III.

It was a princely cavalcade that bore the heiress of Della Ripa to her new territories, and all eyes looked out upon it. The armour of the warlike retainers of the house of Visinara sparkled in the sun, and the more peaceful servitors were attired with a gorgeousness that would have done honour to an Eastern clime. The old Chief of Della Ripa, than whom one more fierce and brave never existed in all Italy, had that morning given his daughter's hand to Giovanni of Visinara; and as she neared the castle that was henceforth to be her home, every point from which

a view of the procession could be obtained was seized upon.

"By my patron saint, but it is a goodly sight!" exclaimed one of a group of maidens, gathered at a window beneath which the bridal cavalcade was prancing. "Only look at Master Pietro, the seneschal."

"And at the steel points of the halberds—how they shine in the crimson of the setting sun."

"Nay, rather look at these lovely dames that follow—the Lady Adelaide's tire-women. By the sacred relics! if her beauty exceed that of her maidens, it must be rare to look upon. See the gold and purple of their palfreys' horsecloths waving in the air."

"Hist! hist! it is the Count of Visinara in his emblazoned carriage! How haughtily he sits; but the Visinara is a haughty race. And—yes—see—by his side—oh, how lovely! Signora Montani, look! That face might win a kingdom."

Gina Montani, who stood in the corner of the lattice, shielded from view by its massive frame, may possibly have heard, but she answered not.

"Say what you will of his pride, he is the handsomest man that ever lived," exclaimed a damsel, enthusiastically. "Look at him now—he sits bare-headed, his plumed cap resting on his knee—where will you find a face and form like that?"

"What is *she* like?" interrupted an old duenna,

snappishly, who, standing behind, could not as yet obtain a view of the coveted sight ; “ we know enough of his looks, let us hear something of hers. But you girls are ever the same : if a troop of sister angels came down from heaven, and a graceless cavalier appeared at the other side, you would turn your backs to the angels and your eyes upon him. Is she as handsome as the young Lady Beatrice, the count’s sister, who married away a year ago ? ”

“ Oh, mother, she is not like her. Beatrice of Visinara had a warm countenance, with eyes black as the darkest night, and brilliant as a diamond aigrette.”

“ And are the wife’s not black ? ” screamed out the duenna. “ They ought to be : her blood is pure Italian.”

“ They are blue as heaven’s sky, and her face is dazzling to behold from its extreme fairness, and her golden hair droops in curls almost to her waist—it is a band of diamonds, you observe, that confines it from the temples. But you can see her now, mother : remember you one half so lovely ? ”

“ Dio mio ! ” uttered the woman, startled at the beautiful vision that now came within her sight ; “ the Lord of Visinara has not sacrificed his liberty for nothing.”

“ Mark you her rich white dress, mother, with its corsage of diamonds, and the sleeves looped up to the

elbow with lace and jewels? And over it, nearly hiding her fair neck, is a mantle of blue velvet, clasped by a diamond star. And see, she is taking her glove off, and her hand is raised to her cheek—small and delicate it is too, as befitteth her rank and beauty. And—look!—he lays his own upon it as she drops it, but she would draw it from him to replace the glove. Now he bends to speak to her, and she steals a glance at him with her blushing cheeks and her eyes full of love. And now he is bowing to the people—hark how they shout, ‘Long life to the Lady Adelaide—long life and happiness to the Count and Countess of Visinara!’

“She is very beautiful, Bianca; but——”

“Ay, what? You are a reader of countenances, madre mia; what see you there?”

“That she is proud and self-willed. And woe be to any who may hereafter look upon her handsome husband with an eye of favour, for she loves him.”

“Can there be a doubt of that?” echoed Bianca: “has she not married him? And look at his attractions: see this goodly lot of cavaliers speeding on to join his banquet; can any there compare with him?”

“Chi é stracco di bonaccie, si mariti,” answered the old lady. “Have you, Bianca, yet to learn that the comeliest mates oftentimes bring anything but love to the altar?”

Bianca made a grimace, as if she doubted. "It would have come sure enough, then," she said, aloud; "for none could be brought into daily contact with one so attractive and not learn to love him."

"And who should this be in a saintly habit, following the bridal equipage on his mule? Surely the spiritual director of the Lady Adelaide—the Father Anselmo it must be, that we have heard speak of. A faithful man, but stern, it is told; and so his countenance would betray. Bend your heads in reverence, my children: the holy man is bestowing his blessings."

"How ~~savage~~ I should be were I the Lady Beatrice, not to be able to come to the wedding," broke in the sickly Bianca. "She reckoned fully upon it, they say, and had caused her dress to be prepared—one to rival the bride's in splendour."

"She has enough to do with her newly-born infant," mumbled the good duenna. "Gaiety first, care afterwards; a christening usually follows a wedding. Come, girls, there's nothing more to see."

"Nay, mother mine, some of these dames that follow, guests for the banquet, lack not beauty."

"Pish," uttered a fair young girl, who had hitherto been silent; "it would be waste of time to look at their faces after the Lady Adelaide's."

"Who is that going away? The Signora Montani?"

Why, it has not all passed, signora. She is gone, I declare! What a curious girl she seems, that."

"Do you know what they say?" cried little Lisa, Bianca's cousin.

"What do they say?"

"That her mother is a descendant of those dreadful people over the sea, who have no religion, the heretics."

The pious duenna boxed her niece's ears.

"You sinful little monkey, to utter such heresy!" she cried, when anger allowed her to speak.

"They do say so!" sobbed the young lady, dancing about with the passion she dared not otherwise vent. "And people *do* say," she continued, out of bravado, and smarting under the pain, "that they are heretics themselves: or else why do they never come to mass?"

"The old Signora Montani is nearly bedridden: how could she get to mass?" laughed Bianca.

"Don't answer her, Bianca. If she says such a thing here again—if she insinuates that the Signora Gina, knowing herself to be in such league with the Evil One, would dare to put her head inside a faithful house such as this, I will cause her to do public penance—the wicked little calumniator!" concluded the good duenna, adding a few finishing strokes upon Lisa's ear.

IV.

LONG lasted the bridal banquet, and merrily it sped. Ere its conclusion, and when the hours were drawing towards midnight, the young Lady Adelaide, attended by her maidens, was conducted to her dressing-chamber, according to the custom of the times and of the country.

She sat down in front of a large mirror whilst they disrobed her. They took the circlet of diamonds from her head, the jewels from her neck and arms, and then removed the elegant bridal dress; and there she sat, in a dressing-robe of cambric and lace, while they brushed and braided her beautiful hair.

As they were thus engaged, the lady's eyes ran round and round the costly chamber. The furniture and appurtenances were of the most *recherché* description: it had been the count's pleasure so to decorate it for his bride. One article in particular attracted her admiration. It was a small, but costly cabinet of malachite marble, exquisitely mounted in silver, and had been a present to the count from a Russian despot. In the inner part was a fixed mirror, encircled by a large frame of silver, and on the projecting slab stood open essence-bottles of pure crystal in silver frames, emitting various perfumes. As she

continued to look at this novelty—the marble called malachite was even more rare and costly in those days than it is in ours—she perceived lying by the side of the scent-bottles, a piece of folded paper. Wondering what it could be, she desired one of the ladies to bring it to her. It proved to be a sealed letter, and was addressed to herself.

The conscious blush of love rose to her cheeks, for she deemed it was some communication or present from her husband. She opened it, and the contents instantly caught her eye, in the soft, pure light which the lamps shed over the apartment :—

“TO THE LADY ADELAIDE, COUNTESS OF VISINARA.

“You fancy yourself the beloved of Giovanni, Count of Visinara, but retire not to your rest this night, lady, in any such vain imagining. The heart of the count has long been given to another, and you know, by your love for him, that such passion—that of first love—can never change its object. Had he met you in earlier life, it might have been otherwise. He marries you, for your lineage is a high one, and she, in the world’s eye and in that of his own haughty race, was no fitting mate for him.”

The bridegroom was still at the banquet, for some of his guests drank deeply, when a hasty summons

came to him. Quitting the hall, he found standing outside two of his bride's attendants.

"Sir Count, the Lady Adelaide——"

"Has retired?" he observed, finding they hesitated, yet feeling somewhat surprised at so speedy a summons.

"Nay, signor, not retired, but——"

"But what? Speak out."

"We were disrobing the Lady Adelaide, Sir Count, when she saw in the chamber a note addressed to her. And—and—she read it, and fainted, in spite of the essence we poured on her hands and brow."

"A note!—fainted!" ejaculated the count.

"It was an insulting letter, signor; for Irene, the youngest of the Lady Adelaide's attendants, read the first line or two of it aloud, before we could prevent her, it having fallen, open, to the floor. Our lady is yet insensible, and the Signora Lucrezia desires us to acquaint you, my lord."

Without another word he turned from them, and, passing through the various corridors, entered the dressing-chamber. The Lady Adelaide was still motionless, but a faint colouring had begun to appear in her face.

"What is this, signora?" demanded the count of the chief attendant, Lucrezia.

"It must be owing to this letter, Sir Count, which

was waiting for her on the cabinet," was the lady's reply, holding out the open note. "The Lady Adelaide fainted while she was perusing it."

"Fold it up," interrupted the count, "and replace it there." And Lucrezia did as she was bid.

"You may now go," said Giovanni to the attendants, advancing to support his bride himself, as she revived. "When the countess has need of you, you shall be summoned."

"You have read that letter?" were the first connected words of the Lady Adelaide.

"Nay, my love, surely not without your permission. Will you that I read it?"

She motioned in the affirmative.

A guilty, glowing colour came over his face as he read. From whom did it come? That it alluded to Gina Montani there was no doubt. He felt sure, or thought he did, that Gina had no act or part in so dishonourable a trick. Yet what may not be expected from a jealous woman? Now came his trial.

"Was it not enough to make me ill?" demanded Adelaide. And he stammered something by way of answer.

"Giovanni," she exclaimed, passionately, "deceive me not. Tell me what I have to fear: how much of your love is left for me—if any."

He tried to soothe her. He told her an enemy

must have done this: and he mentioned Gina Montani, though not by name. He said that he had sometimes visited her house, but not to love, and that the letter must allude to this.

"You *say* you did not love her!" she cried, resentment in her tone, as she listened to the tale.

For a single second he hesitated. But for her own sake he felt it to be his duty to lull her suspicions. The flush of shame rose to his brow for he deemed a falsehood dishonourable

"In truth I did not. My love is yours, Adelaide."

"Why did you visit her?"

"I can hardly tell you. I hardly know myself; want of thought—or of occupation probably."

"You surely did not wrong her?" was the next whispered question as she turned her face from him.

"Wrong *her*! Did you know her, you could not admit the possibility of the idea," he answered, resentment in his tone now. "She is of gentle birth, has been carefully reared, and is as innocent as you are."

"Who is she?—what is her name?"

"Adelaide, let us forget the subject. I have told you I loved her not: and I should not have mentioned this at all, but that I can think of nothing else to which that diabolical letter can have alluded. Believe me, my own wife"—and he drew her to him as he

spoke—"that I have not done you so great an injury as to marry where I could not love."

"Oh," she exclaimed, wringing her hands, "that this cruel news had not been given me! Giovanni," she continued, vehemently, and half sinking on her knees before him, "deceive me not. If there be aught of truth in this accusation, let me depart. I am your wife but in name; a slight ceremony only has passed between us, and we both know how readily, with such influence as ours, the Church at Rome would dissolve that. Suffer me to depart ere I shall be indeed your wife."

"Adelaide," he replied, mournfully, as he held her, "I thought you loved me."

"I do—I do. None can know how passionately. My very life is bound up in yours; but it is because I so love you, that I could not brook a rival."

"You have no rival, Adelaide. You never shall have one."

"I mean not a rival in the vulgar acceptation of the term," she replied, a shade of haughtiness mingling with her tone—"but one in your heart—your mind. This I could not bear."

"Adelaide, hear me. Some enemy, wishing to do me a foul injury, has thrust himself between us: but, rely on it, they are but false cowards who stab in the dark. I have sought you these many months; I have

striven to gain your love; I have now made you mine. Talk not of separation, Adelaide."

She burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

"Adelaide," he whispered, as he fondly clasped her to his heart, "believe that I love you; believe that you have no rival, and that I will give you none. I have made you my wife—the wife of my bosom: you are, and ever shall be, my only love."

Sweet words! And the Lady Adelaide suffered her disturbed mind to yield to them, resolutely thrusting away the dreadful thought that the heart of her attractive husband could ever have been given to another.

V.

MONTHS elapsed, and the Lady Adelaide was the happiest of the happy, although now and again the remembrance of that anonymous letter would flit into her mind like a dream. That most rare felicity was indeed hers, of passionately idolizing one from whom she need never be separated by night or by day. But how was it with him? Love is almost the only passion which cannot be called forth or turned aside at will, and though the Count di Visinara treated his wife, and ever would so treat her, with the most

anxious affection, though he strove with all his might and main to love her, his rebellious heart was still true to Gina Montani.

But now the count had to leave home on business; to remain away fifteen days. In those earlier times women could not accompany their lords everywhere, as they may in these; and when Giovanni rode away from his castle gates, the Lady Adelaide sank in solitude upon the arm of one of her costly sofas, all rich with brocaded velvet; and though not a tear dimmed her eye, or a line of pain marked her forehead, to tell of suppressed feelings, it seemed to her that her heart was breaking.

It was on the morrow. News was brought to the countess that one craved admission to her—a maiden, young and beautiful, the servitor said; and the Lady Adelaide ordered her to be admitted.

Young and beautiful indeed, and so she looked, as, with downcast eyes, the visitor was ushered in. *You* know her, reader, though the Lady Adelaide did not. She began to stammer out an incoherent explanation: that news had reached her of the retirement of one of the Lady Adelaide's attendants, and of her wish to fill the vacant place.

"What is your name?" inquired the countess, already taken, as the young are apt to be, with the prepossessing manners and appearance of her visitor.

"Signora, it is Gina Montani."

"And in whose household have you resided?"

A deep shade rose to Gina's face. "Madam, as yet only in my mother's. But she is dead and I am alone in the world. I have heard much of the Countess of Visinara's gentleness and worth, and I should wish to serve her."

Some further conversation, a few preliminary arrangements, and Gina Montani was installed at the castle as one of the countess's maids in waiting. A somewhat contradistinctive term, be it understood, to a *waiting-maid*; these attendants of high-born gentlewomen being then made, in a great degree, their companions. Gina speedily rose in favour. Her manners were gentle and unassuming; and there was ever a sadness about her which, coupled with her great beauty, rendered her eminently interesting.

VI.

THE Lady Adelaide stood at the eastern window of the purple-room—so called from its magnificent hangings—watching eagerly for the appearance of her husband, it being the day and hour of his expected return. So had she stood since the morning. Ah! what pleasure is there in this world like that of

watching for a beloved one? At the opposite end of the apartment sat her ladies, engaged upon some fancy work, then in vogue.

"Come hither, Lucrezia," said the lady at length. "Discern you yon groups of trees in the distance, through which glimpses of the highway may be distinguished? See you aught?"

"Nothing but the road, my lady. And yet, now I look attentively, there seems to be a movement, as of a body of horsemen. It should be the count, madam, and his followers."

"I think it is, Lucrezia," said the Lady Adelaide, calmly, not suffering her emotion to appear in the presence of her maidens, for that haughty girl brooked not that others should read her deep love for Giovanni. "You may return to your embroidery."

The Count di Visinara rode at a sharp trot towards his home, followed by his retainers. When near enough to see his wife at the window, he quickened the pace to a gallop, after taking off his plumed cap, and waving his hand towards her in the distance. She pressed her heart to still its throbbing, as she heard him rattle over the drawbridge.

She was turning to leave the apartment to welcome him, when he entered, so great haste had he made. Without observing that she was not alone, he threw his arms round her, fondly drew aside her fair golden

curls, and kissed her repeatedly. She drew back, the glowing crimson overspreading her face; and then the count turned and saw they were not alone. At the extreme end of the apartment, out of hearing, but within sight, were the damsels seated over their embroidery.

"Gina," murmured one of the girls, still pursuing her work, "what has made you turn so pale? You are as white as Juliette's dress."

"Is the Signora Montani ill?" demanded Lucrezia sharply; for she liked not Gina.

"A sudden pain—a spasm in my side," gasped poor Gina. "It is over now."

"Is he not an attractive man?" whispered another of the ladies in Gina's ear.

"He?"

"The Count di Visinara. I suppose you never saw him before? They are well matched for beauty, he and the Lady Adelaide."

"Pray attend to your work, and let this gossiping cease," exclaimed Lucrezia, angrily.

Giovanni and his wife remained at the window, their backs towards the damsels. She suffered her hand to remain in his—they could not see *that*—and conversed with him in confidential tones. Then she began chattering to him of her new attendant, saying how lovely she was, how pleasing and sad and gentle.

In the midst of this, a servant announced the mid-day meal.

"Now you shall see my favourite," she exclaimed, as he took her hand to conduct her to the banquet-hall. "I will stop as I pass them, to look at their work, and you shall tell me if you do not think her very beautiful."

"Scarcely, Adelaide, when beside you."

"She is about my age," ran on Adelaide, whose spirits were raised to exuberance. But it had never entered the mind of that haughty lady to imagine the possibility of the Lord of Visinara, *her husband*, looking upon any attendant of hers with real admiration, or she might not have discussed their personal merits.

"How goes on the work, Lucrezia?" demanded the Lady Adelaide, halting close to her attendants.

"Favourably, madam," answered the signora, rising from her seat.

"That is a beautiful part that you are engaged upon, Gina. Bring it forward, that we may exhibit our handiwork to my lord."

Gina Montani, without raising her eyes, and trembling inwardly and outwardly, rose, and advanced with the embroidery. The Signora Lucrezia, detecting her curious agitation, was regarding her, covertly.

"Is it not a handsome pattern?" exclaimed Adelaide, her thoughts now really occupied with the beauty of

the work. "And I was so industrious while you were away, Giovanni. I did a good portion of this myself—I did, indeed; all the shadings of the rosebuds are my doing, and those interlaces of silver."

But, raising her pretty face to his, eager for his meed of approbation, Adelaide was startled at its look. It had turned to a frightful pallor.


"Oh, Giovanni, you are ill! My husband, what is it? Giovanni——"

"It is nothing," interrupted the count, leading her hurriedly from the room. "I rode hard, and the sun was hot. A cup of wine will restore me."

But not less awake to this emotion of the count's than she had been to Gina's, was the Signora Lucrezia, and she came to the conclusion that there was some unaccountable mystery at the bottom of it. Which mystery she forthwith, as a matter of course, determined to do all in her power to solve.

VII.

DAYS passed. The count had not yet seen Gina alone, though he had sought for the opportunity; but one morning when he entered the embroidery-room—so called—Gina sat there alone, sorting silks. He did



not observe her at first, and, being in search of his wife, called to her.

"Adelaide?"

"The Lady Adelaide is not here, signor," was Gina's reply, as she rose from her seat.

"Gina," he said, advancing cautiously, and speaking in an undertone, "what in the name of all that was foolish brought you here—an inmate of my house—the attendant of the Lady Adelaide?"

"You shall hear the truth," she gasped, leaning against the wall for support. "I have lived all these months in my dreary home, unseeing you, uncared for, knowing only that you were happy with another. Giovanni, can you picture what I endured? My mother died—you may have heard of it—and her relations sent to ask me to go into their distant country, and would have comforted me; but I would not go. I remained on here, alone, to be near you. Oh, it was long, long! I struggled much with my unhappy passion. My very soul was wearing away with despair. I would see you pass sometimes at a distance with your retainers—and that was heaven to me. Then came a thought into my mind; I wrestled with it, and would have driven it away—but there it was, ever haunting me. It may be that my better angel sent it there; it may be that the Evil One, who is ever tempting us for ill, urged it on."

"What mean you?" he inquired.

"It suggested," she continued, in a low voice, "that if but to see you at a distance and at rare intervals, could almost compensate for my life of misery, what bliss would be mine were I living under the roof of your own home, liable to see you perhaps even once a-day! Hence you find me numbered amongst your wife's waiting-maids. And blame me not, Giovanni," she hastily concluded, seeing him about to interrupt her; "you are the cause of all, for you sought and gained my love. And such love! I think none can have ever known such. It is the one task of my life to suppress it. The fiercest jealousy of the Lady Adelaide torments my heart—and yet I must suppress it. Giovanni, you have brought this anguish upon me, so blame me not."

"It is a dangerous proceeding, Gina. I was becoming reconciled to our separation; but now—it will be dangerous for both of us."

"Ay," she answered, bitterly, "you had all. Friends, revelry, a wife of rare beauty, the chase, the bustle of an immense household—in short, what had you not to aid your mental struggles? I but my home of solitude, and the jealous pictures, self, but ever inflicted, of your happiness with the Lady Adelaide."

"I still love you, Gina," he repeated. "But you know that I can show it not."

"Do I ask you to show it?—think you I would permit you to show it?" she reiterated quickly. "No, no; I did not come here to sow discord in your household. Suffer me to live on unnoticed, as of these last few days; but, oh! drive me not away from you."

"Gina, Gina, this will never do. I mistrust my own powers of endurance; ay, and of concealment."

"You can think of me but as the waiting-maid of your lady," she interrupted, in a tone of bitterness. "In time you will solely regard me as such."

"There would be another obstacle," he added, his voice sinking to a whisper. "How could you live in my household, and not conform to the usages of our faith? Believe me, Gina, it is a plan that will never answer."

She burst into tears: beseeching him not to drive her away. And to the tears he, against his better judgment, yielded.

"But you understand," he said, somewhat sternly, "that from this moment all confidence ceases between us: we must be to each other as strangers."

"Even so," she acquiesced. "Yet if you deem that my enduring affection deserves-requital, give me at times a look as of old; a smile, unperceived by others, but acknowledged by, and too dear to, my own heart. I ask no more than that. It will be a token that you have not driven away all remembrance of

our once youthful love, though it is at an end for ever."

He smiled sadly now in answer, and they parted by different doors. He to seek his wife, she the solitude of her chamber. And no sooner had the sound of their footsteps died away in the gallery, than out of a closet in the room stepped the Signora Lucrezia, her eyes and mouth wide open, and her hair standing on end.

"May all the saints reject me if ever I met with such a plot as this!" she ejaculated. "I knew there was something underhand about her, but who would have suspected this! So the innocent-faced madam is nothing but a she-wolf in sheep's petticoats! That dreadful letter is explained now. May I die unabsolved if ever I met with the like of this! It is her fault, the wicked one; not his. She must have bewitched him with her false face. If my baby mistress did but know it! *Her* rival—and she showering down favours on her! A pretty life the count will lead between the two, dear good man!—and neither of them fit to tie his shoes. I'll keep my eyes and ears open: there will be an explosion some day, or my name is not Lucrezia Andriani."

PART THE SECOND.

I.

THERE was much bustle and commotion in the Castle of Visinara. Servitors ran hither and thither, the tire-maidens stood in groups to gossip with each other, messengers were despatched in various directions, and skilful leeches and experienced nurses were brought in. Then came a long silence. Voices were hushed and footsteps muffled; the apartments of the countess were darkened, and naught was heard saving the issued whisper, or the stealthy tread of the sick-chamber. The Lady Adelaide was ill.

Hours elapsed—hours of intolerable suspense to the Lord of Visinara; and then were heard deep, heartfelt congratulations; but they were spoken in a whisper, for the lady was still in danger, and had suffered almost unto death. There was born an heir to Visinara.

And as Giovanni, Count of Visinara, bent over his

child, and embraced its young mother, he felt repaid for all he had suffered in voluntarily severing himself from Gina Montani. From that time he forgot her ; or something very like it. And for this he could not be condemned, for it lay in the line of honour and of duty. Yet it was another proof, if one were wanting, of the fickle nature of man's love. It has been well compared to words written on the sands.

Many weeks elapsed ere the Lady Adelaide was allowed to join in the gaieties and festal meetings of the land. A two days' fête, given at the Capella Palace, was the signal for her reappearance in the world. It was to be of great magnificence, and she consented to attend it on the morning of the second day.

She placed herself in front of the large mirror in her dressing-chamber whilst she was prepared for the visit, the same mirror before which she had sat on the evening of her wedding-day. The Signora Lucrezia and Gina were alone present. The former was arranging her fair silken tresses, whilst Gina handed the signora the articles required for the task. The count entered, dressed.

"Giovanni," exclaimed Adelaide, "Lucrezia thinks that I should wear something in my hair—a wreath, or my diamond coronet ; but I feel tired already, and wish the dressing was over. Need I be teased with ornaments ?"

"My sweet wife, wear what you best like. *You* need no superficial adorning."

"You hear, Lucrezia: make haste and finish. You may put aside the diamond casket, Gina. Oh, there's my darling!" continued the countess, hearing the baby pass the door with its nurse. "Call him in."

The count himself opened the door, and took his infant.

"The precious, precious child!" exclaimed Adelaide, bending over the infant, which he placed on her knees. "Giovanni," she added, looking up eagerly to her husband's face, "do you think there ever was so lovely a babe sent on earth?"

He smiled at her earnestness—men are never so rapturously blind in the worship of their first-born as women. But he stooped down, and fondly pressed his lips upon her forehead, while he played with the little hand of the infant. She yielded to the temptation of suffering her face to rest for a moment close to his.

"But it grows late," resumed the young mother. "Take the baby to its nurse, Lucrezia;" and she kissed it fifty times as she resigned it.

The count had chanced to draw behind his wife: and there stood Gina. He was struck by the pallid sorrow of her countenance. Ill-fated Gina! and he had been so absorbed these weeks in his new happiness!


A rush of pity, mingled perhaps with self-reproach, penetrated his heart. In that moment he remembered her last words at the interview in the embroidery-room, and gave her a look—the look she had coveted.

It was not to be mistaken. Love—love, pure and tender—gleamed from his eyes; and Gina answered him with a smile which told her thanks. Had any one been looking on, they could scarcely fail to become aware of their mutual love, or of a secret understanding between them.

And one was looking on. In the large glass before her the Lady Adelaide had distinctly seen the reflection of all that took place. Her countenance became white as death, and her anger was terrible.

“You may retire for the present,” she said, in a calm, subdued tone, to the startled Gina, upon whose mind flashed somewhat of the truth. “Tell the Signora Lucrezia not to return until I call for her.”

To describe the scene that ensued would be difficult. The shock to the young wife’s feelings had been very great. That her husband was faithless to her, not only in deed but in heart, she never doubted. It was in vain he endeavoured to explain all; she listened to him not. To her, he seemed to be uttering falsehoods, which but increased his treachery. Gina had once spoken of her fierce jealousy: but what was hers



compared with the Lady Adelaide's? In the midst of her explosion of passion, Lucrezia, who had misunderstood her lady's prohibitory message, entered, and stood aghast: until admonished from the room again by a haughty wave of the count's hand.

He departed for the Capella fête alone. His wife refused to go.

"Mercy! mercy!" she moaned in anguish, as she remained alone in her apartments. "To be thus requited by Giovanni—whom I so loved! My husband—my own husband! Is it possible that a man can be guilty of treachery so deep? Would that I had died ere I knew his faithlessness. To introduce her into our home, into my very presence, an attendant on my person. That I should be so degraded! Surely a wife, young and beautiful, was never treated as I have been. Lowered in the eyes of my own servants; insulted by him who ought to have guarded me from insult; laughed at—ridiculed by *her*! Oh! terrible! terrible!"

The Lady Adelaide had taken up a wrong and exaggerated view of the case. Rising as she spoke the last words, she unlocked the bright green cabinet, that of malachite marble already spoken of, and took from thence a small box of silver gilt. Touching the secret spring of this, she drew forth a letter, opened, and read it:—

“‘TO THE LADY ADELAIDE, COUNTESS OF VISINARA.

“‘You fancy yourself the beloved of Giovanni, Count of Visinara; but retire not to your rest this night, lady, in any such vain imagining. The heart of the count has long been given to another; and you know, by your love for him, that such passion—that of first love—can never change its object. Had he met you in earlier life, it might have been otherwise. He marries you, for your lineage is a high one, and she, in the world’s eye and in that of his own haughty race, was no fitting mate for him.’”

“Ay,” she shuddered, “it is explained now. So, Gina Montani was this beloved one. I am his by sufferance—she, by love. Holy Mother, have mercy on my brain! I *know* they love—I see it all too plainly. And I could believe his deceitful explanation, and trust him. I *told* him I believed it on our wedding-night. *He did not know why he went to her house; habit, he supposed, or want of occupation.* Oh, shame on his false words! Shame on my own credulity!”

None of us can forget the stanzas in Collins’s “Ode to the Passions:”—

“Thy numbers, Jealousy, to nought were fixed,
Sad proof of thy distressful state:
Of differing themes the veering song was mixed,
And now it courted love—now, raving, called on hate.”

And calling, indeed, upon hate, as she strode her chamber in a frenzy near akin to madness, was the Lady Adelaide, when her attendant, Lucrezia, entered.

"My dear lady," she exclaimed, bursting into tears, false as those of a crocodile, "my dear, dear young lady, I cannot know that you are thus suffering, and keep away from your presence. Pardon me for intruding upon you against orders."

The Lady Adelaide smoothed her brow, and the lines of her face resumed their haughtiness, as she imperiously motioned Lucrezia to quit the room. The heart most awake to the miseries of life wears to the world the coldest surface; and it was not in the Lady Adelaide's nature to betray aught of her emotions to any living being; saving, perhaps, to her husband.

"Nay, my lady, suffer me to remain yet a moment. At least, while I disclose what I know of that viper."

The Lady Adelaide started; but she suppressed all excitement, and set herself to listen. Lucrezia began her tale—an exaggerated account of the interview she had been a witness to between the Lord of Visinara and Gina Montani. The countess listened to its conclusion, and a low moan escaped her.

"What think you now, madam, she deserves?"

"*To die!*" burst from the pale lips of the unhappy lady.

"To die," acquiesced Lucrezia, calmly. "No other

punishment would meet her guilt; and no other, that I am aware of, could be devised to bring you security for the future."

"Oh! tempt me not," cried the lady, wringing her hands. "I spoke hastily."

"And wisely, madam," put in Lucrezia. "Give but the orders."

"How can I?" demanded the Lady Adelaide, once more pacing the room, in her anguish; "how could I ever rest afterwards, with so great a guilt upon my soul?"

"It will be no guilt, lady."

"Lucrezia!"

"I have made it my business to inquire much about this girl—to ascertain her history. I thought it my duty to do so, and very soon I should have laid the whole matter before you."

"Well?"

"You may destroy her, madam, as you would destroy that little bird there in its golden cage, without sin and without compunction."

"Oh, Lucrezia, Lucrezia! once more I say unto thee, Tempt me not. Wicked and artful though she is, she is still one of God's creatures."

"Scarcely, my lady," answered the bigoted woman, with a gesture which spoke of deep scorn for the culprit. "I have cause to believe—good cause," she

repeated, lowering her voice, and looking round, as if she feared the very walls might hear the fearful words she was about to utter, "that she is one of those lost creatures who are enemies to our faith and to Heaven : a descendant of the Saxons, and an apostate."

"*What say you ?*" gasped the Lady Adelaide.

"That we have been harbouring a heretic, madam," continued Lucrezia, her passion rising. "No wonder that evil has fallen upon this house."

"Go to the cell of Father Anselmo," shivered the Lady Adelaide, "and pray his holiness to step hither. This doubt shall at once be set at rest."

II.

GINA MONTANI, her head aching with suspense and anxiety, was shut up alone in her chamber, when she received a summons to attend her mistress. Obeying at once, she found the confessor, Father Anselmo, sitting there, by the side of the countess. He cast his eyes steadfastly upon Gina, as if examining her features.

"Never, my daughter, never!" he said, at length, turning to the countess. "I can take upon myself to assert that this damsel of thine has never once appeared before me to be shriven."

"Examine her," was the reply of the lady.

"Daughter," said the priest, turning to Gina, "for so I would fain call thee, what faith is it that thou professest?"

Gina raised her hand to her burning temples. She saw that all was discovered. But when she removed it, the perplexity in her face had cleared away, and her resolution was taken.

"The truth, the truth," she murmured; "for good, or for ill, I will tell it now. I am not a Roman Catholic," she answered timidly.

The Lady Adelaide crossed herself, as if for protection from the words: she had been reared in all the bigotry and superstition of the times. Gina grasped the arm of the chair against which she was standing. She was endeavouring to steel her heart to bravery; but in those days, and in that country, such a scene was a terrible ordeal.

"Dost thou not worship the One True God?" asked the priest, looking with compassion upon the sad and unhappy girl.

"I worship the One True God," replied Gina, solemnly, joining her hands in a reverent attitude. "But we—we—do not recognize the Pope."

"And yet, child, to him it is given to mediate between man and Heaven. Hast thou yet to learn," continued the priest, troubled and aghast, "that in the

next world there is a place of torture kept for unbelievers—a gulf of burning flames, to be extinguished never ? ”

“ We are told there is such a place,” she answered, struggling with her tears, for the interview was becoming too painful. “ May the infinite love and mercy of God keep both you and me from it ! ”

“ Thou art bold,” he cried. “ Whence hast thou imbibed these doctrines ? ”

“ My mother wedded with an Italian,” answered Gina ; “ but she was born on the free soil of England, and reared in its Reformed Faith.”

“ And this mother of thine, child : where may she be ? ”

“ She is dead,” gasped Gina, bursting into tears. “ I have no guide now but my Bible.”

Now, it is well known that in those ages in Italy the Bible was regarded as a very unfit book to be read indiscriminately by the people. The priest shook his head. To the Lady Adelaide and to Lucrezia, Gina’s confessions brought absolute horror.

“ She is hopeless,” gasped the former.

“ I fear me so, my daughter. At least, at present,” added the priest ; some benevolent idea crossing his mind that perhaps he might by his teachings redeem her. “ Fetch me thy Bible, child,” he said to Gina. “ I will take care of it for a time.”

She took it out of a pocket underneath her gown. An English Bible. The priest could not read it.

"Dost thou speak this language, then, daughter?"

"It is familiar to me as my own," replied Gina.

"Oh, father, father!" cried the Lady Adelaide, sinking at his feet, after Gina had been despatched to her chamber, and giving vent involuntarily to sobs of agony, "she has dared to come between me and my husband—he has known her long, it seems. If she should taint him with this dreadful heresy?"

Father Anselmo did not like the suggestion. Giovanni of Visinara was a true servant of his Church and a liberal benefactor. In his perplexity, he made for the moment no rejoinder.

"It will not be a crime to remove her, father," faltered the Lady Adelaide.

"*Crime!*" repeated the priest. "Canst thou connect the word with any such procedure? It is, on the contrary, a measure needful to be taken."

But the probability is that the speaker never supposed that any measure, more stringent than that of removing her from the castle, was contemplated.

"To remove her in *any way*," persisted the lady, in a whisper. "Yet the world might call it by—by an ugly name."

"Certainly, in any way," assented the father. "By force, if necessary."

"Thou wilt then grant me absolution beforehand, holy father," implored the Lady Adelaide, the tears streaming from her eyes.

"For all that thou canst do, my child," he smiled. "Thou hast not been used to these troublous duties; thy life has been one of peace and sunshine."

"Oh true, true! I have been too happy. My waiting-woman, Lucrezia, says she has a plan, holy father, to—to—to effect it, by which all scandal may be avoided. She waits only for my orders."

"Thou canst give them, my daughter."

And the Lady Adelaide, believing that she had received sanction for the worst, for so terrible a deed that she had not dared to allude to it in words—and in that reticence may have lain the fatal misapprehension—summoned Lucrezia to her when the priest had departed.

III.

THE castle was wrapped in silence, it being past the hour at which the household retired to repose. Gina Montani was in her night-dress, though as yet she had not touched her hair, which remained in long curls, as she had worn it in the day. Suspense and agitation caused her movements to be slow, to linger;

and she sat at her dressing-table in a musing attitude, her head resting on her hand, wondering what would be the ending to all that the day had brought forth. She had dismissed her attendant an hour ago.

With a deep sigh she rose to continue her preparations for rest, when the door softly opened, and the Signora Lucrezia appeared.

"You need not prepare yourself for bed," observed Lucrezia, in a low, distinct whisper; "another sort of bed is preparing for you."

"What do you mean?" demanded the startled girl.

"That you are this night to die."

Gina shrieked.

"I may tell you," interrupted the lady, "that screams and resistance will be wholly useless. Your doom is irrevocable, therefore it may save you trouble to be silent."

"You are speaking falsely to me. I have done nothing to deserve death."

"Equivocation will be alike unavailing," repeated Lucrezia. "And if you ask what you have done—you have dared to step with your ill-placed passion between my lord and the Lady Adelaide: you have brought discredit upon the faith of this house and of the land."

"I have disturbed no one's faith," returned Gina; "I wish to disturb none. It is true that I love

Giovanni, Count di Visinara, but I loved him long ere he saw the Lady Adelaide."

"What!" cried the signora, her brow darkening, "do you dare to avow your shame to my face?"

"It is no shame," answered Gina, sadly; "there is nothing of guilt in such a love as mine."

"Follow me," repeated Lucrezia. "You have no time to waste in lamentations."

"By whose orders do I die?" demanded the indignant girl. "Not by *his*; and no one else has a right to condemn me."

Lucrezia expected this, and was prepared. Alas, that the Lord of Visinara should that day have inadvertently left his signet-ring behind him!

"Do you know this ring?" demanded Lucrezia, holding out the jewel.

"Too well. It is the Count of Visinara's."

"You may then know who has condemned you."

"But the count is at the Capella Palace. He is not yet back from the fêtes."

"Not back!" returned Lucrezia, scornfully. "Heard you not the clatter of the men? Some of them had imbibed largely of the Capella wine, I trow. I bring this ring from him I say: a proof that he has condemned you."

"Oh, Giovanni!" wailed Gina, as she sank prostrate on the floor in her anguish, and no longer doubting,

"this from you!" All idea of resistance vanished with the thought that it was him she so loved who doomed her to destruction. "How long is it since he returned?"

"I came not to waste the moments in idle words," said Lucrezia, brazening out her falsehoods. "It is sufficient for you to know that he *has* returned, and has given the orders that you seem inclined to resist."

"Implore him to come to me for one moment, for a last farewell."

"I may not ask it. He is with the Lady Adelaide."

"First, my happiness, then, my life; both sacrificed to appease the Lady Adelaide! Oh, Giovanni! false, but dear Giovanni——"

"I have no orders to call those who will use violence," interrupted the signora, "but I must do so if you delay to follow me."

"I am about to dress myself," returned Gina.

"The dress you have on will serve as well as another. And better: for a night-gown bears some resemblance to a shroud."

"One moment for prayer," was the next imploring petition.

"Prayer for you!" broke contemptuously from the signora.

"A single moment for prayer," reiterated the victim.

"If I am, indeed, about to meet my Maker, I stand fearfully in need of it; for I have of late worshipped one, more perhaps than I have Him."

"Prayer for you, you heretic!" contemptuously retorted Lucrezia, who, in her own way, was very much of a saint.

Yet still Gina repeated it. "A few moments for prayer—in mercy!"

"Then pray away where you are going," was the impatient answer. "You will have time enough, and to spare—minutes, and hours. Perhaps days."

The signora evidently took a strange pleasure in urging on the death of Gina Montani. What could be the reason? Women in general are not so frightfully cruel. The truth was, that she herself loved the count. The giddy Bianca had said, when watching the bridal cavalcade, that none could be brought into daily contact with one so attractive as he, and not learn to love him. So had it proved with Lucrezia. Being the favourite attendant of her mistress, she was much with her, and consequently daily and frequently in the company of Giovanni. He had many a gay word and passing jest for her, for he was by nature a gallant, free-spoken man; and this had brought forth its result. Whilst he never gave a thought to her but as of one who waited on his wife, he became to her heart dangerously dear; and her jealousy of Gina,

arising first of all from the interview she had witnessed in the embroidery-room, now at least equalled that of the Lady Adelaide.

Pushing the unfortunate girl on before her, Lucrezia silently passed onwards to the more remote parts of the castle. She bore a lantern in her hand which emitted a dim, uncertain light. At length they came to a passage a little beyond the chapel, far removed from the habited apartments; and in the middle of this were two male forms, busily occupied at work of some description. A lantern, similar to the one Lucrezia carried, was hanging high up against the opposite wall; another stood on the ground. Gina stopped and shivered; but Lucrezia touched her arm, and she walked on.

They were nearing the men, who were habited as monks, probably for disguise, their faces shielded beneath cowls, when the signora halted and pressed her hand upon her brow, as if in thought. Presently she turned to Gina. A second lie was in her mouth; but how was the ill-fated young lady to know it?

"*He sent you a message,*" she whispered. "It is his last request to you. Will you receive it?" The unhappy victim looked up eagerly.

"He requests, then, by his love for you—by the remembrance of the happy moments you once spent together, that you neither resist nor scream."

Her heart was too full to speak ; but she bowed her head in acquiescence. Lucrezia moved to go on.

"How is my life to be taken ? By the dagger ? By blows ?"

"By neither—by nothing. Not a hair of your head will be touched."

"Ah ! I might have guessed. It is by poison."

"It will be taken by *nothing*, I tell you. Why do you not listen to me ?"

"You speak in riddles," said Gina, faintly. "But I will bear my fate, whatever it may be."

"And in silence ? *He* asks it by your mutual love."

"All, all, for his sake," she answered. "Tell him, that as I have loved, so will I obey him to the last."

Lucrezia walked on, and Gina followed. Whether she understood the manner of her death, might be a question ; but, faithful to the imagined wish of her lover, she uttered neither remonstrance nor cry. The clock was upon the stroke of one, when smothered groans of fear and anguish told that her punishment had begun ; she understood it then : but no louder sound broke the midnight silence, or carried the appalling deed to the inhabitants of the castle. An hour passed before all was completed ; they were long in doing their deed of vengeance ; and when it was


over, Gina Montani had been removed from the world for ever.

"Madam, she is gone!" was the salutation of Lucrezia, her teeth chattering, and her face the hue of a corpse, when she entered the chamber of her mistress.

The Lady Adelaide had not retired to rest. She was pacing her apartment in unutterable misery. The social conditions of life, its forms and objects, were to her as nothing since her terrible awaking to reality.

Morning had dawned before the return of the Lord of Visinara. The festivities had lasted long. He was fatigued both in body and mind, and, throwing himself upon a couch, sank to sleep. An unusual disturbance and commotion aroused him. The household, struck with amazement and terror, were telling a strange tale: one that, for the moment, drove the life-blood from his heart. The wicked dealing of Gina Montani had been brought to light on the previous day. What these wicked dealings consisted of, no one professed to be able to define, except that Gina had confessed in the presence of the good Father Anselmo that she was in league with the Evil One. And the Evil One had appeared in the night, and had run away with her—a just reward.

In those times, a reputed visit of his Satanic Majesty



in propria persona would have been likely to obtain more credence than it could in these; but it would probably be going too far to say that the Lord of Visinara participated in the belief of his horror-stricken household: neither could he trace any positive foundation for the assertion. Gina was gone. To say the least of it, Satan or no Satan, her disappearance was mysterious in the extreme. The maid who waited on her testified that she assisted Gina to undress on the previous night. In proof of which, the garments she had taken off were found in the chamber. The remainder of her clothes were also in their places undisturbed; the only article missing being a night-dress, which the attendant in question said she saw her put on; and her bed had not been slept in. Giovanni spoke to his wife, but she observed a cold, haughty silence, confessing to nothing: it was quite useless to question her. The house was searched and searched, and the neighbourhood, for miles round, scoured; but no trace or tidings of her whatever could be obtained. And yet, strange to say, in passing on that first morning through the remote corridors, the count fancied he heard her voice pronounce his name in a tone of imploring agony. Whether this was but fancy, or whether she had indeed called to him, he never knew, then or later. He searched himself in every nook and corner, but nothing came of it.

After a time, peace was once more restored between him and his wife: but the perfect bliss of her once secure love for him had ceased for ever. As to Lucrezia, she seemed to have acquired a scared kind of look and manner; was more devout at prayers than before, and offered up no end of candles.

And so the time passed on.


IV.

It was the hour of midnight. In the nursery at the castle sat the head-nurse, holding on her lap the dying heir of Visinara, now some eight or ten months old. Until about nine days previously, he had been a fine, healthy child, but from that time a wasting fever had attacked him. It had left him pale and cold; ill unto death.

The Lady Adelaide, her eyes blinded with tears, knelt beside him, gazing on his colourless face. The count himself was gently rubbing his little hands, to try and excite some warmth in them.

"Do you not think he looks a little, a *very* little better?" demanded the lady, anxiously.

The nurse hesitated. She did not think so, but she was unwilling to say what she thought.



"His hands—are they any warmer, Giovanni?"

The count shook his head. The Lady Adelaide pressed her lips upon the infant's damp forehead, and burst into renewed tears.

"You will be ill, Adelaide," said her husband. "This incessant watching is bad for you. Let me persuade you to take an hour's rest."

She motioned in the negative.

"Indeed, madam, but you ought to do so," interposed Lucrezia, who was present. "These many nights you have passed without sleep; and your health so delicate!"

"Lie down—lie down, my love," he interposed, "if only for a short time."

And at length she was induced to comply, the nurse undertaking to let her know if there should be the slightest change in the child. Giovanni passed his arm round his wife to lead her from the chamber, for she was painfully weak; but they had scarcely gone ten steps from the door, when a prolonged, shrill scream, as of one in unutterable terror, reached their ears. They rushed back again.

The nurse sat, her dilating eyes fixed on one corner of the room, her face rigid with horror. It was she who had screamed.

"My child! my child!" groaned the Lady Adelaide.

"Nurse, what in the name of terror is the matter?"

exclaimed the count, perceiving no alteration in the infant. "You look as if you had seen a spectre!"

"I have seen one," shuddered the nurse.

"What *have* you been dreaming of?" he returned, angrily.

"As true as that we are all assembled here, my lord," continued the nurse, solemnly, "I saw the spirit of Gina Montani!"

A change came over the Lord of Visinara's countenance, but he spoke not. The Lady Adelaide clung to her husband in fear; while Lucrezia, who had been listening in perplexed amazement, darted into the midst of the group, and laid hold of the nurse's chair.

"What absurdity!" exclaimed the count, recovering himself. "How could such an idea enter your head?"

"Were it the last word I had to speak, my lord," continued the woman, "and to my dying day, I will maintain what I assert. I saw Gina Montani. She stood in a night-dress, *there*, where the lamp casts its shade."

"Nonsense," repeated the count, abstractedly. But Lucrezia was white, and shook convulsively.

At this moment, a wild, frantic sob burst from the Lady Adelaide. The child was dead!

V.

MANY months again slipped by, with little to distinguish them saving the decreasing strength of the Lady Adelaide. She had been wasting slowly away ever since the shock given to her heart at discovering her husband's love for Gina Montani. She loved him passionately, and she *knew* her love must be unrequited; for the affections once bestowed, as his had been, can never be recalled and given to another. The illness of the mind wrought upon the body. She became worse and worse; and after the birth of a second child, it was evident that she was sinking rapidly.

She lay upon the stately bed in her magnificent chamber, about which were scattered many articles consecrated to her girlhood, or to her happy bridal, and, as such, precious. Seated by the bedside was her husband, one of his hands clasping hers. In the other hand he held a cambric handkerchief, with which he occasionally wiped her languid brow.

"Bear with me a little longer, my husband. But a short time."

"Bear with you, Adelaide!" he repeated. "Would to Heaven you might be spared to me!"

"It is impossible," she sighed, pressing his hand upon her wasted bosom.

"Adelaide"—he hesitated, after a while—"I would ask you a question. A question which, if you can, I entreat that you will answer."

She looked at him inquiringly, and he resumed, in a low voice: "What became of Gina Montani?"

Even amidst the pallid hue of death, a hectic colour flushed her cheeks at the words. She gasped with agitation before she could speak.

"Bring not up that subject now; the only one that came between us to disturb our peace; the one to which I am indebted for my death. I am lying dying before you, Giovanni, and you can think but of her."

"My love, why will you so misunderstand me?"

"These thoughts excite me dreadfully," she continued. "Let us banish them, if you would have peace visit me in dying."

"May your death be far away yet," he sighed.

"Ah! I trust so! A little longer—a few days with you and my dear child!" And the count clasped his hands together as he silently echoed her prayer.

"Will you reach me my lazuli casket?" she continued. "I have put a few trinkets into it, to leave as tokens of remembrance. I must show you how I wish them bestowed."

He rose from his seat, and looked about the room; but he could not find the jewel-case.

"The small one, Giovanni," she said; "not my diamond casket. I thought it was in the mosaic cabinet. Or perhaps they may have taken it into my dressing-room."

He went into the adjoining apartment, and had found the missing casket, when a wild shriek from her lips smote upon his ear. In an instant he had gained the bedside, and was supporting her. The attendants came running in.

"My dearest Adelaide! What is it that excites you thus?"

But his inquiries were in vain. She lay in his arms sobbing convulsively, and clinging to him in some terrible fear. Broken words came from her at length.

"I looked up—when you were away—and saw—there, in that darkened recess—*her*. I did—I did, Giovanni!"

"Whom?" he said, becoming very pale.

"Her—Gina Montani. She was in white—a long dress it seemed. Oh! Giovanni, leave me not again."

"I will never leave you, Adelaide. But, this—it must have been a fancy—an illusion of the imagination. We had just been speaking of her."

"You remember," she sobbed, "the night our child died—nurse saw her also. It may——"


The lady's voice failed her, and her husband started, for a rapid change was taking place in her countenance.

"I am dying, Giovanni," she uttered, clinging to him, and trembling to the utmost extent of nervous terror. "Oh, support me! A doctor—a priest—Father Anselmo—where are they? He would give me absolution, he said: then why does the remembrance come back again now? It would not have been done without my sanction. Giovanni, my husband—protect and love our child—desert him never. Giovanni, where are you? My sight is going—Giovanni——"

Her voice died away, and the count bowed his head down in his anguish, whilst the attendants pressed forward to look at her countenance. The Lady Adelaide had passed from amongst the living.

VI.

It was many years after the death of the Lady Adelaide, that several workmen were engaged making some extensive alterations in the Castle of Visinara, preparatory to the second marriage of its lord, who



was about to espouse the lovely Elena di Capella. They were taking down the walls of a remote passage, or corridor, leading out of the chapel.

Standing, looking on, was the count, still to all appearance youthful, though he was in reality some years past thirty. By his side stood a fair boy of seven years old. It was the heir of Visinara. He was an open-hearted, engaging child, with a smiling countenance, on which might be traced his father's features, whilst he had inherited his mother's soft blue eyes and her sunny hair.

"What a long while you are!" exclaimed the child, boyishly impatient to see the walls come down. "You should hit harder."

"The walls are very thick, Alberto," observed his father. "All these niches, which have been blocked up, and in the olden time contained statues, have to come down also."

"They are taking down a niche now, are they not, papa?"

"Not yet. They are removing the wall which has been built before it. It appears fresher, too, than the rest; of more recent date."

"It seems extraordinarily fresh, Sir Count," observed one of the workmen. "The materials are old, but it has certainly been rebuilt within a few years—within ten, I should say."

"Not it," laughed the count. "These corridors have not been touched during my lifetime."

"This portion of them has, my lord, you may rely upon it."

As the workman spoke, the remainder came down with a tremendous crash, leaving the niche exposed to view. There was no statue there—but the corpse of the unfortunate Gina Montani, standing upright in her night-dress, was revealed to their sight. It was nearly as fresh as if she had departed but yesterday, having been excluded from the air. The features, it is true, were scarcely to be recognized, but the hair—the long brown curls falling on her neck—was the same as ever.

This was her horrible death, then—to be *walled up alive*.

The Count di Visinara grew sick and faint as he gazed. Before he had time to collect his startled thoughts, the child was pulling at his arm.

"Papa, take me away. What is that dreadful thing there? You look white and cold, too, not as you always do. Oh, what is it? Dear, dear papa, take me from here."

The workmen were affrighted, and shook with fear—perhaps more frightened though less shocked than the count. But one of them, partially recovering himself, touched the corpse with an implement he had

been using for his work, and down it came, a heap of dust.

The Lord of Visinara turned, and with steps that tottered under him, bore his child back to the castle.

VII.

YOU may hear in Italy, unto this day, various versions of this tradition. One will tell you that the Lord of Visinara offered moneys and treasures, even to the half of his possessions, unto the fathers of the Church, if they would lay the troubled spirit of Gina Montani; but that, although the monks tried hard, they could not do it. Another version goes, that the Church did not try, because she had died a heretic. However that may have been, all agree in one respect—that the ghost *was not* laid. That it never would be, and never could be, but still wanders to haunt the descendants of the Lady Adelaide.

Several of these descendants still exist in Tuscany, though greatly reduced in station. And the accredited belief is, that whenever death is going to remove one of them, the spirit of the ill-fated Gina Montani appears and shows itself to them when they are dying.

A TOMB IN A FOREIGN LAND.

I.

HAD they been on the parched, arid shores of India with all the force of its burning sun concentrated on their heads, the heat could scarcely have been more intense. There was no place to turn to for shade; no green spot on which the aching eye could rest: the glare was unbroken and terrible, as it always is there in the brilliant days of summer. The town itself, with its white houses, was anything but grateful to the sight, and though the sky was blue, to that the eye could not raise itself through the universal glare. The sands burnt with heat; the rays of the sun recoiled from the white bathing-machines; the sea glittered to the eye only in an inferior degree to the white sails of the vessels passing up the Channel; and on the water in the harbour the eye dared not and could not rest, for it was like gazing on molten gold, destroying the sight it dazzled.

On the terrace at the Etablissement des Bains, or, as it is often styled, the Casino, sat a bevy of girls of various lands—for crowds of many nations flock in summer to that gay watering-place. They were idly gossiping away the mid-day heat, and longing for the cool of night, and for the dancing it would bring—that they might make themselves hot again. Near to one of the doors opening to the large room sat an English girl. Not tall, but stately as the young American at her side; dreamy and imaginative as the Italian before her; calm and self-possessed as the West Indian, who stood making marks with her parasol upon the gravel beneath; graceful and easy as were the French; and beautiful, as befitted her birthplace, was this English maiden. Listless enough the group all seemed, saving the French, who, as usual, were chattering and gesticulating away. She held a newspaper, this English girl, and glanced at its pages from time to time.

“Have you anything interesting there?” inquired one of the French girls.

“No,” was the reply of Miss Chard, raising her eyes from the journal, and offering it to the fair questioner.

“Ah bah! merci, mademoiselle, all the same, but I never touch a newspaper,” answered the coquettish Gaul.

“The *Débats*!” remarked the haughty West Indian.

"You are fond of politics possibly, Miss Chard; the English mostly are."

"England's men," broke in the American lady, "but not its women, I think. Their minds are not formed for grave thought; their talents are not equal to it."

A quiet, proud smile sat on the beautiful lip of the English girl, though politics were as a sealed book to her. One of the French hastened to speak.

"Ma foi! but the English have talents—talents and pride. Though in all the social conditions of life—a ball-room, for instance, or a morning visit—you might just as well see so many dancing bears."

As she spoke, a gentleman stepped out upon the terrace from the rooms, and the prevailing listlessness was gone. A tall, slender man with one of those beautiful faces often sung of but seldom seen; features exquisitely chiselled and pale almost to a fault. It was impossible, when looking on his courtly mien and dignified bearing, to mistake him for anything but an English *gentleman*; and a vain consciousness of his own attractions might be read in his sleepy eye. Glances of admiration stole towards him, but he seated himself by the side of the young English lady: and her eyes were bent upon the ground, whilst the crimson flush of love rose to her features. His name was Ravensburg.

"I have been to your house, Lucy," he said, in a

whisper: "I thought the heat would have kept you at home. Pardon, mademoiselle," he continued, picking up the handkerchief which one of the French girls dropped in passing him.

The curtsying Gaul, self-possessed from her infancy, with more apologies and bows than an Englishwoman would make in a month, received, as she expected, the property which the handsome young Englishman tendered her, and the conversation became general.

"Who is that?" exclaimed the West Indian, directing their attention to a fresh comer, who now appeared upon the scene—a young lady seemingly not more than eighteen or nineteen.

"How very beautiful!" exclaimed Mr. Ravensburg.

"She is too tall: and so very pale!" dissented one of the French girls.

"But look at her features!" cried the Indian. "Did you ever see such, save in sculpture? and then, you have not the colouring."

"It is the Baroness de Laca," observed the American. "She is a widow."

"A widow? Nonsense!" said Mr. Ravensburg. "She is a mere girl."

"A widow for all that," continued the young American, decisively. "They marry in Spain when they are little better than infants; though *she* was chiefly reared in England, her parents having adopted

your country for their own. They are with her here. We were introduced to them last night. She is very rich, and, it is said, very wilful."

"And very fascinating," continued Mr. Ravensburg, eagerly watching the graceful figure of the Spaniard as it retired from view.

"Smitten!" laughed the West Indian, a smile of mockery on her lip.

The gentleman laughed in return—a laugh as shallow as her own. "Not smitten so easily as you imagine, fair lady."

Lucy Chard raised her eyes, and saw, standing opposite to her on the lower terrace, a singular-looking man. His dress might have befitted some remote Indian prince, or—a member of that fraternity, the "Swell-Mob." Chains, rings, watchguards, seals, studs and diamond-pins shone conspicuously all over him. His looks were of that style that is sometimes mistaken for beauty. What a complexion was his! the lily blending with the carnation; teeth even, and white as ivory—so white and even that a certain doubt might arise in the mind of a bystander; his handsome features (the nose alone an exception to the adjective, and *that* turned up to the skies) were ornamented by a profusion of jet-black ringlets, whiskers, and a fierce moustache. His figure was about the middle height, portly and upright, and his age un-

certain. He held in his hand a small hunting-whip, its handle set in gold, or some metal that looked like it, tapping the tip of his highly-varnished boot, and fixing his bold eyes with a stare of admiration on Lucy Chard. She rose from her seat.

"Francis, I think mamma must be waiting for me."

"Do you know that man, Lucy?" he inquired.

"Not at all," she replied, a supercilious gesture of the eyelids darting involuntarily towards the stranger. Mr. Ravensburg eyed him attentively; but Lucy was waiting, and he drew her hand within his arm, lifting his hat to the party they were leaving.

"How vain the British are!" exclaimed the American girl, gazing after Mr. Ravensburg's receding form; "and he exemplifies the national failing."

"She has the greater vanity, that Miss Chard," rejoined the West Indian, "to think she can secure the whole attention of such a man. *He* constant to one, indeed!"

"That Spanish girl can hear all we are saying. What brings her so near?"

"She drew up when they left; as if she would watch the departure of Mr. Ravensburg."

The carriage of Mrs. Chard waited round at the outer entrance, and that lady, having scanned all the newspapers she cared to see, passed towards it,

followed by Lucy and Mr. Ravensburg; when there, almost close to them, stood the bedizened stranger.

"Do you see that fellow?" inquired Ravensburg, directing Mrs. Chard's attention to the imposing-looking man in question, as he placed Lucy in the carriage by her side.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Mrs. Chard, who would never have become a reader of character had she studied Lavater for a lifetime, and whose taste was peculiar: "what a magnificent man! He must be somebody of consequence."

"He puzzles me," added Ravensburg, checking the smile that would have risen to his lips at the words, "His face seems familiar to me, yet I cannot call to mind where or when I saw it."

The chafed horses, driven into restiveness by the heat and the insects, would wait no longer, but sprang away, fretting and foaming; and when Lucy looked from the carriage after Francis Ravensburg, she again encountered the unhallowed gaze of the stranger.

The day went on to its close. The extreme heat had passed away with the daylight. The Casino rooms were lighted up to receive the crowds pouring into them, and the strains of the music might be already heard. One apartment, a small, square room, had but few people in it, perhaps a dozen. *It was the room appropriated to gambling.* Under the plea of

innocent amusement, "merely a hand at cards to while away an evening hour," play, to an excess, was permitted and carried on, in the year (many years ago now) and at the place of which this story treats. Immense sums were lost and won nightly, and several English ladies of good family were so infatuated, so far forgot the retiring manners befitting an English gentlewoman, as to take part in the diversion.

At one of the small tables sat Mrs. Chard. Her opponent was Colonel Darcy, and they were playing *écarté*. Several bettors stood around. Colonel Darcy was losing, as he had been ever since he sat down; but Mrs. Chard was this night in luck. The lady had marked four; the colonel, none.

"I propose," said the latter, taking up a fresh hand.

"Play," replied Mrs. Chard. And he played the knave of diamonds.

"King and game!" said the lady, throwing down the king of trumps.

The colonel rose and moved away, observing that the cards were against him.

"Will you permit me the honour of playing a game with you, madam?" inquired a very imposing voice, all mouth and consequence, at Mrs. Chard's elbow. And, looking up, she beheld the "magnificent" stranger who had stood near her carriage in the morning.

"My name is Carew, madam," began the stranger;

seating himself in the vacated chair. "My friend, Major"—Mrs. Chard did not catch the name—"promised to introduce me to you to-night, but he is not yet here. Captain Carew."

"Major *who?*" demanded Mrs. Chard, somewhat taken aback by the showy stranger's unceremonious manner.

"Terrible weather, is it not?" remarked Captain Carew, apparently not hearing Mrs. Chard's question. "I left London on my way to Italy, to join my friend, Lord Seymour, but this exaggerated heat has caused a halt in my journey. I cut to you, madam," he concluded, laying down five napoleons.

"Sir," said Mrs. Chard, "those stakes are higher than I play for."

"Fear not, madam: my life on it, you win. I am but an indifferent player, an almost invariable loser."

Mrs. Chard played, and did win. Other games followed with the same result; and the stranger laid down ten napoleons.

"Money seems of little value to you," observed one of the admiring bystanders.

"Men at their ease for it can afford such trifles as these losses without a ruffled temper: and I do not play often," was the complaisant answer.

Outside, in the little garden attached to the lower terrace, hidden from the moonbeams by the trees and

shrubs, stood Francis Ravensburg. The sweet face of his betrothed—betrothed long ago in heart, if not in words—rested close to his. He loved her but with the ordinary love of man—an episode in the drama of man's life. It was shared with the world's pleasures; the pursuits of youth; with admiration for others of her sex and station. Yet he made the rapture and Eden of *her* existence; and she stood there with him in the shade, her heart beating with its excess of happiness. The scene itself was lovely. Upon the terrace, but unseeing them, were many forms of youth and beauty, who had escaped from the heat within; perhaps lovers, as they were. Innumerable fishing-boats were putting out to sea; the pier was crowded with evening promenaders; the cliffs around, contrasting their light and shade, looked majestic enough at that hour; the bright moonbeams were playing on the waves which the tide was sending rapidly up, and the music from the ball-room floated harmoniously on the distance. And there she remained: his arm thrown round her, and her cheek resting passively on his shoulder, listening to the sweet vows he was ever ready to whisper.

Just then, leaning over the terrace at a little distance, appeared the face of a Spanish lady, her features clearly discernible in the bright moonlight.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" murmured Francis Ravens-

burg, as he gazed upon her, unconscious, probably, that he spoke aloud: and Lucy drew away from her lover.

"Lucy, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Chard, coming up as they reappeared in the dancing-room, "allow me to introduce Captain Carew. He desires to dance a quadrille with you."

With an appealing glance, Lucy clung to the arm of Francis Ravensburg: but how could he interfere with a mother's introduction? And the profusely jewelled man bowed, with evident admiration and some grace, over the hand of his lovely partner.

"Your friend appears to be interested in his companion," observed the captain, as he crossed over to Lucy, after figuring away in one of the quadrilles.

Lucy looked round. But a few yards from her stood her lover, conversing animatedly with the Spanish girl. A rush of pain passed through her heart, but she answered her partner with a cold, haughty gesture.

Mrs. Chard left the rooms early, for their heat was intolerable, and Lucy looked for Francis Ravensburg to attend them as usual to the carriage. But he did not notice their departure: he was amongst the dancers. His arm encircled the waist of the young baroness, and his eyes were bent on her with admiration, as he whirled her round the room to the

strains of the most exquisite waltz ever composed by Strauss.

"What an acquisition!" exclaimed Mrs. Chard, settling herself in her carriage, as they drove away. "Do you like him, Lucy?"

"Like him?" repeated Lucy, mechanically, rousing herself out of a reverie, and really not understanding of whom her mother spoke.

"Captain Carew."

"Not at all," said Lucy, with emphasis. "He is extremely disagreeable."

"What?" cried the astonished Mrs. Chard. "Disagreeable! He is one of the most delightful men *I* ever saw—full of general information. But you are so taken up with that young Ravensburg, Lucy, you have eyes and ears for no one else. He hates cards, too."

"Your new acquaintance, mamma?"

"I mean Frank Ravensburg. *He* hate them indeed! he lost his money to-night like a prince—I do believe he is one in disguise. I never won so much in my life, Lucy, at one sitting. I hope and trust he will make some stay in the town."

II.

A MONTH or two passed away, and little alteration had taken place in the position of the parties mentioned above. The youthful Baroness of Laca was turning the heads of half the men, and exciting the envy and jealousy of all the women. But, beyond all doubt, her favoured cavalier was Frank Ravensburg.

It was impossible that Mr. Ravensburg could be otherwise than gratified at the preference the young baroness accorded him, even if love for her found no admission to his vain heart. He was still attentive to Lucy Chard, still enacted the part of her lover; but hour after hour was spent by the side of Isabel de Laca; he would often leave Lucy's side for hers, and his sweetest words were breathed to her. The truth was, he was *fascinated* with her—which is a different thing from love: though, in the height of the delusion, it may appear wondrously like it. But how was Lucy, looking on with a jaundiced eye, to distinguish the difference? And there were times when she was well-nigh stung into madness.

The jewelled stranger, too, had risen into no little favour and importance with the migratory inhabitants of the gay French watering-place. He had served in the Indian army, it was understood, but had for years

retired from it, on an ample fortune. And he was on the most intimate terms (when he lived there) with all the Dons of all the kingdoms of the East. These oft-talked-of pieces of information, coupled with the imposing richness of the gallant captain's attire, the costly ornaments which adorned his pseudo-handsome person, a dashing, off-hand, pushing manner, which in a great man is cried up as proper assumption, and in an inferior one is resented as insolence, were not without their effects on the worshipping minds of the bathing public, and he became their passing idol. In justice to this gentleman, it must be mentioned that those were the days of what the Americans would call "loud" dress and much ornament in the shape of personal jewellery. Such jewellery was not supposed ever to be false then: certainly any one audacious enough to hint it might be so in this instance would have been consigned to Coventry on the spot. Men and women alike courted Captain Carew: even Frank Ravensburg, with all his attractions, was neglected by the ladies for the glaring stranger. But Captain Carew cared not for their admiration: Lucy Chard alone occupied his thoughts, and his attentions were continually lavished upon her, in spite of her shrinking rejection of them. His leisure time was devoted to gambling; he seemed to have grown wonderfully fond of it: and fortune invariably seemed to favour

him now, as if in defiance of his former depreciating assertion to Mrs. Chard. Had he not been so immensely above such a suspicion, people might have begun to doubt whether his playing was quite on the square. Heavy sums had been lost to him in more quarters than one, and it was whispered that Mrs. Chard was his debtor to a frightful amount.

Carriages were passing to and fro on the crowded port, amongst them Mrs. Chard's: and during a momentary stoppage, caused by a blockade of fish-carts, a horseman, well mounted, reined in by its side, and placed his delicately-gloved hand on its panels.

"Shall you be at the rooms to-night, Lucy?" he whispered.

"Mamma will. But—Francis,"—she grew strangely agitated—"I have things to say to you, and would remain at home if you can come in. Will you sacrifice this one evening to me?"

"Sacrifice! It is a strange term, Lucy, when applied to us. I will be with you early in the evening."

She sighed deeply. Unfortunately, another person had heard the last sentence. Even Captain Carew, who stood, unseen, close to the elbow of the young horseman.

When the stoppage on the road was removed, the carriage rolled on, and Frank Ravensburg continued by its side; but, in the crowded state of the port, to

retain this post became a work of difficulty; and, with a word of adieu to Lucy, he drew away. On the return of the carriage soon afterwards, Mr. Ravensburg had resigned his steed to his groom, and was pacing the port, side by side with Isabel de Laca.

"This night shall end it," murmured Lucy, closing her aching eyes when the unwelcome vision had passed. "An explanation shall take place between us, and I will return his love-gifts to him, or—retain them for ever."

In the evening, according to his promise to Lucy, Francis Ravensburg set out for the château occupied by Mrs. Chard, which was situated about half-a-mile from the town. When half-way there, he encountered Captain Carew: the captain having been a dinner-guest at the château.

"A day too late for the fair, Mr. Ravensburg, if you are bound for Mrs. Chard's," was his accosting salutation. "They have left the house for the rooms. There goes the carriage," he added, pointing to the upper road.

"Who have left it?" demanded Frank, haughtily.

"Mrs. Chard and Lucy, with Madame de Larme. She dined with us."

"*Miss Chard?*" uttered Frank, interrogatively, looking as if he would willingly have cut the gallant captain in two.

"Did I not say so?" returned the captain. "I

thought I did. She seemed inclined to remain at home—blooming for a whole evening alone, like the last Rose of Summer—but I persuaded her out of the romantic idea.”

“Coxcomb!” muttered Frank between his closed teeth. “But it is a shame of Lucy to be so changeable.”

Retracing his steps, Mr. Ravensburg called in at his hotel, to make some alteration in his dress for the rooms. And there he found a letter, summoning him to England on urgent business. His first care was to ascertain at what hour the first steamer for England quitted the port. He found one would leave for London at three in the morning, and secured a berth in it. Some few other preparations were necessary, and by the time they were completed, it was hard upon ten o’clock. He then took his way to the rooms, where he expected to find Lucy.

“By the way,” he soliloquized, as he walked on with a quick step, “did not Isabel say something on the port to-day about their leaving to-morrow for England? It was just as that bustle occurred when little Judd was thrown from his horse, and I lost her afterwards. I do hope it is so: she is the sweetest girl (I can never think of her as a married woman) I know—next to Lucy. By Jove! to have her as *compagnon de voyage* would reconcile one to all its customary inconveniences.”

With the last consoling reflection he reached the rooms, and giving his hat to an attendant, entered the heated dancing-apartment. But his eyes roved round it in vain in search of Lucy, and he made his way to the card-room.

"Where is Lucy?" he inquired of Mrs. Chard, who was of course amongst the players; her anxious countenance betokening that her luck was not great.

"Do procure me an ice, Mr. Ravensburg," was her answer; "I am dying for one. Those servants never come into this room, where they are most wanted."

"But where can I find Lucy?"

"The king again?" exclaimed the agitated woman. "Captain Carew, what luck you have! The ice, pray, Mr. Ravensburg."

"And Lucy?" repeated Frank, bringing her the ice with all speed.

"Lucy? Oh, she would not come to-night; she remained at home. Some whim, I suppose. You deal, captain."

"You told me Miss Chard was on her way hither," cried Ravensburg, darting a ferocious look at the sparkling player.

"My good fellow, I thought she was. But who is to be answerable for a woman's mind? It shifts as often as a weather-cock. Game, Mrs. Chard."

"I would give a trifle if I could recollect where it

is I have seen that walking jeweller," ejaculated Frank. "I know it was at nothing creditable. The remembrance haunts me like a nightmare, and yet I can make of it nothing tangible. I must write to Lucy from London and explain," thought he; "it is too late to go there now."

"Isabel!" he exclaimed, seeking out the young baroness, "did you tell me, or not, that you thought of going to England?"

"To-morrow, by the Dover boat."

"And I start to-night at three. I am called to London on business."

"Then delay your voyage until to-morrow. Papa and mamma can take care of each other, and you can take care of me," she laughed. "Don't say no, Mr. Ravensburg."

"It will make but little difference, only a few hours, in the time of my arrival in town," he soliloquized, "and I should escape that horrid long passage as well. True I ought not to delay: but—I *will* wait—and—and in that case I can see Lucy to-morrow."

And communicating his decision to Madame de Laca, just as the music struck up a waltz, he placed his arm on her delicate waist, round which glittered a zone of jewels, and whirled her away until her head was dizzy.

And there stood Lucy Chard on the balcony of her

mother's château ; there she had stood ever since eight o'clock, watching the road that led from the town, with a flushed cheek, and a heart sick with expectation. Every fresh footstep, sounding in the stillness of the night, was listened to ; but long before its owner came in sight, the strangely-fine ear of love had told her it was not that of Francis Ravensburg. The stars came out, shining brilliantly. Lucy looked up at the constellations : she knew their places, where they were, or would be, later in the year. The Great Bear, creeping on ; the Giant Orion, with its rapid strides ; the lady in her chair ; the united Pleiades, and many others ; some were there, some not : but she turned to look, in vain, for Sirius, beautiful amongst the stars.

The sound of the church clocks, telling nine, came borne towards her on the breeze. "This is the impatience of a *lover* !" she exclaimed, with a burst of anguish. She took a costly trinket from her bosom, which he had placed there but three little months before, recalling his words as he did so. And she began reasoning with herself that he could not be false to her—oh never, never ! And so the moments dragged by until the bells told ten, and then she laid her aching forehead upon the cold iron balcony. Had she heard the old Chinese proverb ?

"To expect one who does not come : to lie in bed

and not to sleep: to serve and not to be advanced, are three things enough to kill a man."

To expect one who does not come: and he more to her than earth; to dread that, even then, whilst she was watching in vain mockery, he was with her rival: shedding upon her the heaven of his presence; whispering passionate vows, that once were hers, in her ear; pressing his coveted kisses on her lips! If you have never experienced this, do not attempt to guess at the anguish of Lucy Chard.

Her mother's voice aroused her long after, scolding her for being out there in the cold. Lucy entered. She could not avoid observing, in spite of the painful anxiety of her own feelings, that Mrs. Chard seemed to be unnaturally excited, paced the room with a troubled step. But, full of suspense and suspicion about her lover, wishing, perhaps, to know the worst, she turned her face from her mother, and spoke.

"Did you happen to see Mr. Ravensburg?"

"See him, yes. He was at the rooms, waltzing away with Isabel de Laca when I left."

A cold shiver ran through Lucy's veins, and her sight seemed to leave her; but excepting for the terrible paleness of her features, no outward emotion was visible. All her fearful doubts were realized; her worst jealousy was confirmed: Francis Ravensburg had deserted her for another.

"Lucy, you do not look well," observed Mrs. Chard; "you must have been out of your mind to stand on that balcony. The nights are chilly now. Take a glass of wine."

"Not any, thank you," she replied. "I am tired, and will go to bed. Good-night——"

"Oh," interrupted Mrs. Chard, "Mr. Ravensburg told me he was going to England to-night."

Lucy let fall the handle of the door, and turned.

"I think he said so. I hardly know. My luck has been wretched, Lucy. I wish to Heaven I had never touched a card! I wish to Heaven I had never played with Captain Carew!"

"But Mr. Ravensburg?" questioned Lucy.

"I don't recollect much of what he said. Called there upon business, I think it was. Go and ask the baroness to-morrow; no doubt she can tell you all about it."

"Good-night, mamma," said the unhappy girl.

The steamer for Dover was to start at one o'clock the following day. Previously to that, Mr. Ravensburg went to the château. Lucy was out. Mrs. Chard, alarmed at Lucy's pale cheeks and absent manner when she rose, had hurried her out for a drive, sorely, sorely against her will. He waited, hoping they would return; but at length he was obliged to go, for time pressed. Not with a quick

step, however, for he still hoped to meet her, if but to have one single parting word; and upon encountering a great bathing-omnibus on his way, he leaped upon its step, thinking it might contain Lucy, to the untold-of scandal of its chief occupant, a "sister" from the convent of the Dames Ursulines, who was conducting some younger "sisters" to take their daily plunge in the sea.

But Ravensburg jumped off the step quicker than he had leaped on it, for the bell, giving notice of the starting of the steamer, was sounding in his ear. He tore along, and halloed with all his might. The steamer was putting off from the side, and its commander was already on the paddle-box.

"Heigh, boat! Stop, captain!" cried the bedizened Carew, who stood on the edge of the port close to the steamer, his chains and his shining stones glittering in the sun. "Here's a passenger coming full tear. You'd better wait."

"We are behind our time already," grumbled the captain. "Shove away there! Take care of them cords."

"But here he is," screamed Carew; "it is Mr. Ravensburg. Just wait half-a-moment. I know he has important business in England."

"Make haste, then," roared the captain, directing his voice to the distance. "Hold hard a minute, lads."

"Thank you, thank you," panted Ravensburg to Carew, as he tossed his permit to the police-officer, and leaped on to the paddle-box.

"Yes," added the sailor-captain, "you may thank that gentleman for being taken to England to-day, Mr. Ravensburg. I should have been some yards up the harbour."

Ravensburg looked to the quay, and again nodded his thanks to Captain Carew; but on the latter's countenance sat so strange an expression of triumph—*of triumph over him*—that he stood aghast. Feeling confounded for a moment, he concluded that the glare must have deceived him; and, descending to the deck, he clasped the offered hand of Isabel de Laca, and seated himself beside her.

"Do you see that steamer?" demanded Captain Carew, an hour afterwards, of Lucy, pointing to the Dover boat, that had now traversed half her distance, as he stood at the north-western window of Mrs. Chard's drawing-room, which commanded a wide expanse of sea.

Lucy turned her eyes towards the Channel.

"You are looking at the wrong one—what a beautifully clear day it is!—the one on the left is coming from Dover; the one on the right is nearing it; it is the latter I mean."

"What of it?" questioned Lucy.

"It contains Frank Ravensburg and his lady-love," whispered the captain, fixing his eyes on Lucy's crimsoned and rebellious countenance, as he seized her hands. "He is there with Isabel de Laca; his dearest Isabel, as I heard him call her last night. Such terms can only exist between the closest and sweetest ties: even I have not yet addressed such to you."

The words were bad enough, but to be thus kept face to face with that man was, to Lucy, horrible.

"Unhand me, Captain Carew," she indignantly exclaimed. "How dare you so address me?—how dare you touch me?"

He dared to do more, for he bent down and kissed her, still keeping her a prisoner.

"Marry *first*, Lucy," he said, unheeding her anger; "marry first, and the triumph will be yours. We will go forth and blazon our happiness in his face; we, the loving bridegroom and bride."

But the climax of indignation gave Lucy unnatural strength; she wrenched her hands from him, and pulled the bell-rope violently.

"Begone," she cried, spurning him with a motion of her foot; "another moment, and I order the servants to thrust you forth."

He seized again her trembling hands, he looked in her agitated, indignant countenance, and spoke in slow and measured terms.

"Do so, Lucy Chard ; but know that, by so doing, you destroy your mother."

There was truth, terrible truth, in his words and aspect ; and Lucy, with a sensation of fear that approached to suffocation, motioned the coming servants from the room, and sinking on a chair, signed to him to explain himself, but to approach her not.

It was a humiliating position—a violation alike of human and of nature's laws—for a mother to be kneeling at the feet of her only child, suing for forgiveness, praying to be saved from poverty and exposure ; yet in the autumn we are writing of, in the château inhabited by Mrs. Chard, that scene was enacted.

"Take all, take all !" cried the ill-fated girl, clasping her hands in agony, and, in her turn, kneeling to her mother. "Sacrifice my fortune to his rapacity ; I will never think of it, never ask for it ; but oh, spare me !"

"He holds bonds for *all*, Lucy," returned the miserable woman. "I, your sole guardian, have violated my trust. Money, estates, jewels, furniture, all have long been his ; but Heaven knows that when I in my madness staked yours, I did it with the hope that I might redeem what I had lost."

"Oh this play!—this infatuation !" moaned Lucy. "How can people so blindly rush on to their ruin ?"

"Make the worst of it, Lucy : you cannot know


half its horrors, the hell it creates. Reproach me—spurn me—it will be relief compared with what I have of late endured.”

“I would give my very life for you, mother, to ensure your happiness,” she faintly said, “but I cannot sacrifice myself to this man.”

“It would be no sacrifice, Lucy,” pleaded Mrs. Chard; “did I think so, I would never urge it. Your girl’s thoughts have been given to Francis Ravensburg, and all other men appear to you distasteful. But now that he has forsaken you, gone to England with that Spanish woman, whom he is about to make his wife, would you be so lost in respect to yourself as to let him retain his hold upon your heart? Would you let *the world* suspect it?”

Lucy pressed her hands upon her throbbing temples. It would be a mercy could she shut out for ever the light of day.

“Unless you consent to marry *him*, Lucy, when he will return all my bonds, retaining only such as belong to you, there must be an exposure,” she exclaimed, passionately; “no earthly help can avert it. For the poverty I should care comparatively little, *but I will not survive exposure*. Lucy: I speak calmly, rationally, firm in my own purpose: I will not survive it. Child! it is a fearful thing to deliberately destroy a mother.”



Captain Carew entered, an accepted suitor. Mrs. Chard had murmured some heartfelt words of thanks to Lucy, and Captain Carew advanced towards his future bride, a speech of love or congratulation on his lips, when Lucy, who was trembling as if she had the ague, fell forward in a fainting-fit.

A strange tale went about the town. Of a man's covetous eyes cast upon a girl, and resolving to win her, though she was promised to another; of a mother being inveigled into play until she had staked and lost all; until shame and ruin stared her in the face; and of the child being offered up as the propitiatory sacrifice. But when names came to be mentioned, people laughed at the tale. A sacrifice to marry *him*! to share his riches, his jewels! Lucy was to be envied. And as to Mrs. Chard's having lost her fortune—why she was still living at her château; in the same style, at the same expense. Nonsense, nonsense! the tale was one of the usual fabricated scandals of an English-frequented continental town. But what would that town have said could it have known that Mrs. Chard suppressed letters written to her daughter, from London, by Francis Ravensburg?

Lucy's consent being once wrung from her, Mrs. Chard took care that no time should be allowed her to retract it. She at once took her to Dover, where the ceremony was to be performed. The captain had

strenuously urged that the wedding should take place in Paris, but Mrs. Chard as strenuously refused, observing that one never knew whether those foreign marriages stood good or not. So the captain had to yield, and it was arranged that he should follow them to Dover in three weeks. The affair, meanwhile, was kept a secret.

III.

In the drawing-room of one of the handsomest houses in Cavendish Square sat Isabel de Laca. A visitor was heard ascending the staircase, and the strange light of excitement at the presence of one beloved sat in her eye. It was Francis Ravensburg who entered.

He advanced to her not exactly as a lover, for no endearment was offered; but the tender, earnest regard with which he looked at her, and the lingering retention of the hand held out to him, told that he was not many degrees removed from one.

"I have some news for you," she said, in a quiet tone, but which, indifferent as it was, betrayed a cause for triumph, though Mr. Ravensburg detected it not. "I had a letter this morning from Madame de Larne."

"Ah! some continental news," he answered, a faint colour rising to his face.

"You remember that extraordinary-looking man, who played so high? He has gone over to Dover to be married."

"The walking-jeweller," returned Frank. "And who, pray, has been dazzled by his perfections?"

"Miss Chard."

"Absurd," he exclaimed, starting from his seat, the indignant blood rushing over his features. "My dear baroness, you ought not to give credit to the malicious fabrications of that Madame de Larme."

"She says," continued Isabel, unheeding his interruption, "that Mrs. Chard has lost frightfully to Monsieur le Capitaine, and *dared* not refuse him her daughter. Any way, she and Lucy are staying there at the hotel."

"Isabel!" he exclaimed, emotion taking away all his self-possession, "there can surely be no truth in this?"

She turned from him coldly.

"Have you any objection to my seeing the letter?" he inquired.

She tossed it to him, and then began to walk indifferently about the room while he perused it, humming a scrap of an old, translated Spanish ballad. The first words audible were the following: perhaps she spoke them more distinctly than the rest:—

" behold,
A baron, all covered with jewels and gold,
Arrived at fair Imogene's door.
His treasures, his presents, his spacious domain,
Soon made her untrue to her vows;
He dazzled her eyes, he bewildered her brain,
He caught her affections, so light and so vain,
And carried her home——"

"By Heaven, I have found it!" exclaimed Ravensburg, dashing his hand with so much force on the centre table that the lady's song was cut short, in consternation.

"That man—that demon," he continued, in answer to her gaze of inquiry. "You know, Isabel, I have often said how he puzzled me. And to think," he pursued, in strange excitement, "that Lucy Chard should have been insulted by a companionship with him! There is contamination in his touch—infection in his very presence!"

"Who or what is he?" inquired the astonished woman. "Do you allude to Captain Carew?"

"Captain Carew!" was the ironical answer. "The fellow's name is plain Charles Johns. He is an out-cast from society—a man whose conduct drew upon him the eye of the police—whose success in a certain swindling transaction, last spring, only became known to them coeval with his disappearance. But they shall not long remain in ignorance of his being in England. At Dover, eh!"

"These are serious charges, Francis."

"They are true ones. How could I be so long deceived by him! But I see it all now: false hair, false whiskers, false teeth, the paint on his face, and so altered a style of dress. *Captain Carew*, indeed! the impudent fellow!"


"But how came you to be acquainted with such a man?" was the next inquiry.

"Before he relapsed into worse crimes, he held a discreditable situation at a West-end gambling-house," was Mr. Ravensburg's answer, "and I have seen him there. That he should have been brought into contact with Lucy Chard!"

"Putting his dress and his presumption aside, the man had something of the gentleman about him."

"I believe he was one years ago. Educated as one, at any rate."

It was the morning subsequent to the above conversation that a breakfast-party sat in a private room of the chief hotel at Dover. Mrs. Chard was next the fire, doing the honours of the table: opposite to her, in a flowery, gaudy, stiffened-out silk dressing-gown, with more baubles about him than ever, bloomed Captain Carew: and between them, pale, inanimate, as much like an automaton as a living being, drooped Lucy. She was plainly attired in a white morning robe, and, as if in contrast to the resplendent appearance of the



captain, she wore no ornament. Not a precious stone, or a bit of gold was about her, except the wedding-ring. She had been a bride three days—dejected, suffering, heart-broken; but so silent, so uncomplaining, that the mother who had sacrificed her, looked on her with a bleeding, if not with a remorseful heart.

“A delightful morning!” exclaimed the captain, helping himself to a third plateful of spiced beef. “We shall have a favourable trip, Lucy. With this wind, we shall be at Ostend in seven hours. I am sure you will like Brussels, and Baden-Baden’s delightful.”

“You look very cold, Lucy,” said Mrs. Chard. “I fear I keep the fire from you.”

“I wish you would try an egg, my love,” gobbled the captain. “And a slice of this beef would do you an immense deal of good, if you would but eat it.”

Lucy had been so extremely ill upon the wedding-day that Mrs. Chard had absolutely refused to allow her to cross the Channel, and had detained her until now at Dover. A servant entered with a letter and two newspapers, all of which he placed before Mrs. Chard.

“No letter for me, waiter?” demanded Captain Carew.

“None, sir.”

There never were any letters for him, but he regularly made the same inquiry.

Mrs. Chard glanced at the address of the letter, and hastily thrust it into her apron pocket. "Will you look at the *Times*, captain?" she said, handing him the journal in question: "and there's the *Morning Post* for you, Lucy."

The captain was busy with his breakfast, but his wretched wife mechanically opened the paper. At this moment there was heard a slight bustle and talking outside the room-door. It was suddenly opened, and the face of the head-waiter was thrust in.

"Captain Carew, if you please, can you step here for a moment? Now don't," added the man in an aside to somebody behind him, "don't come in sight of the ladies: they would be frightened out of their wits. He'll come out in a minute, fast enough, and then you can do the job without any bother."

"What is it?" said the captain. "I am at breakfast."

"Won't detain you a moment, sir," added the waiter, kicking out his feet at the legs of those behind, with the view of keeping them at a distance.

The captain rose and walked out of the room, swinging his breakfast-napkin majestically in his hand. Ranged against the wall was an officer from Bow Street, backed by a couple of Dover policemen. The head-waiter shut the door.

Lucy was engaged with the newspaper, and Mrs.

Chard, turning away, opened the letter. She knew the handwriting. A note was inside, addressed "Miss Chard." The lady stirred the fire into a blaze, popped it in, and read her own :—

"MY DEAR MADAM,

"I have just heard that you are staying at Dover, and that the individual, calling himself Captain Carew, is also there. It has been discovered who this man is. You may remember I said he puzzled me; but his disguise was so thoroughly complete. False hair and whiskers, false teeth, a false complexion, and so altered a style of dress, would deceive the detectives themselves. His true name is Charles Johns. His career has, for long past, been most disreputable; and a successful swindling transaction, in which he was recently engaged, put him into funds, and sent him flying over the water, out of the reach of Bow Street. Ere you receive this, he will be in custody. I write in haste, and will give you further particulars when we meet. Deeply annoyed that this villain should ever have come into contact with you and Lucy,

"Believe me, yours very faithfully,

"FRANCIS RAVENSBURG."

With an exclamation of horror, Mrs. Chard threw

down the letter. One fearful confirmation of its contents rushed to her mind: he had married in the name of Charles Johns Carew. She darted to the door; and there, handcuffed, supported by the officers, and gazed at by half the servants of the house, was her gallant son-in-law, his terror visible even through his carmined cheeks. Lucy took up the letter, and read it, every word.

"Not one mention of me," murmured the unhappy girl, "not one word of remembrance: yet, for all he knows, I am still free as air."

IV.

AUTUMN, winter, spring rolled away, and the summer was quickly passing. Mrs. Chard had returned at once, with her daughter, to her residence on the French coast. Who can describe the care that had been bestowed upon Lucy: who shall imagine the soothing tenderness of her remorseful mother to win her back to health? But all in vain. Her star of happiness had set, and that of life was on the very verge of the horizon.

Occasionally they took her to the terrace at the Casino, hoping that the gay scene and groups of visitors might draw her thoughts from herself. She

was now growing almost too weak to go; but one warm, lovely morning, was prevailed upon to give an apathetic consent, observing that it would probably be for the last time. Mrs. Chard, dismissing the carriage, placed Lucy on one of the terrace benches, and went herself to the newspaper-room.

Not long had Lucy sat there when a party entered the large room, and approached the window near Lucy: two ladies, and a tall, stately young man. He was the husband of the younger lady. They were Madame de Larme, the Baroness de Laca, who did not resign her title with her second marriage, and Francis Ravensburg. Presently he strolled from the room, and seated himself outside. A veiled, shrinking form was at the end of the bench, hidden from those within, and his face was turned towards his young wife and her companion, as he talked with them through the window, so that he observed her not.

"Do they play here as much as ever?" asked Mr. Ravensburg of Madame de Larme.

"Mon Dieu, non!" answered madame, shrugging her shoulders. "Such odd things were said last season, about people being ruined, and the like. I don't know whether they were true. However, cards have been interdicted."

"The place seems little changed," remarked the baroness, looking round. "I remember well the first

time I ever saw it: it was also the first time I saw you, Francis. And though I was what you English call 'taken' with you, I little thought I was looking on my future husband."

"I never believed you would be his wife," said the Frenchwoman, bluntly; "I took it for granted he was engaged to Lucy Chard. Quite a sad thing, was it not, for her husband to be called out so soon to his Indian possessions?"

"Indian possessions!" echoed Ravensburg. "Oh, ah, yes! I understand. He is on his Indian possessions now—or on some others. How did you hear that, madame?"

"How did every one else hear it?" retorted madame. "They had been married but three days, when the captain received news which caused him to embark for India."

"From whence he is not likely to return," said Mr. Ravensburg.

"His wife, poor young thing, has moped herself into something—it is not consumption, I believe; but she is dying."

"She was an angel!" interrupted Ravensburg, passionately. His wife laughed a little affected laugh of irony, and the two ladies moved away. He was about to follow them, when a low suffocating, ill-suppressed sob broke upon his ear. He took no notice

of it; it was nothing to him; and at that moment the well-known carriage of Mrs. Chard bowled suddenly up to the terrace-entrance, turned, and waited. The lady on the bench arose, and tottered, rather than walked, towards it.

"Good mercy!" he articulated, lifting his hands. There—seated by him—she of whom he had taken no notice, was Lucy Chard.

"Forgive me, Lucy," he murmured, springing towards her; "forgive me, but I recognized you not. You are so fearfully altered."

She was indeed. A shrunken, wasted form, white attenuated features, on which coming death had set his shadow and its colouring, were all that remained of Lucy Chard. A powerful agitation impeded her utterance, but she motioned him towards the carriage. The servants touched their hats as they recognized him; the footman held the door open, and Francis helped her in.

"Drive home quickly," she gasped to the servants: "you can return for my mother."

"Lucy, are we thus to part?"

She resigned to him the hands he would have taken, and he stood there, leaning in towards her, and motioning the footman to a distance. The remembrance of former days came over him: memory leaped back to the time when he was last in that carriage,

and she, his best beloved, at his side. He recalled the vows he had then made her, so confident in the enduring faith of his own weak heart. He forgot their separation; he forgot his own marriage, or remembered it but with a passing execration, and unconsciously he addressed words of endearment to her as of old.

"I am dying, Francis," she said, "and you are shocked to see me. I can speak freely to you now, almost as I would to myself, because I know that in a few days, perhaps hours, time for me will be no more: *You made me what I am.*"

"Lucy!"

"You know the wretched marriage I was forced into—you have heard its details?"

"Some of them."

"That was your work. Had it not been for your conduct towards me, I never should have fallen into it. You professed to love me."

"It was no profession, Lucy."

"And *I* worshipped *you*—I lived but in your presence—I clung to you as to life: and you left me for another. In the evening, in the morning, at noon-day you were with her; riding, walking, whispering by her side."

"Oh, Lucy, believe me, I had no love for her! I did it without thought. She was an attractive woman,

and I was willing to while away an idle hour. I never loved her."

"It may have been so," she feebly articulated. "Want of thought causes more misery than want of heart. I could not read your secret feelings: I only knew you were ever with another."

He acknowledged it had been as she said, and would have poured forth his vain repentance. Repentance! what availeth it, when there can be no atonement?

"Forgive me, Lucy," he murmured, as he touched her pale young face, "forgive, forgive me. Oh that I could as readily forgive myself! Had I taken care to keep you for my own, you never would have been brought to this."

The scalding tears were coursing down her cheeks, and lingeringly she withdrew her hands from his. "I have forgiven you long ago, Francis: may you be happy with the wife you have chosen. Farewell! Farewell!"

He closed the door; the footman sprang up behind; the carriage rolled away, and Lucy sank back in it. The excitement caused by thus suddenly meeting him had been too great. A fearful oppression, almost as of coming death, was upon her: she thought life was about to depart there and then; and when she would have spoken to the coachman to drive faster, her strength suddenly failed.

When the carriage reached the château-gates, there, heated and breathless, stood Francis Ravensburg. He opened the door himself, and would have lifted her out. But she remained in the corner, huddled up, it seemed, half sitting, half lying. He turned his colourless face to the servants, and there was something in it which caused them hastily to approach. She had died in the carriage.

Not in the cemetery attached to the gossiping French seaport, with its numerous groups of summer idlers, but in that of a retired country hamlet, a few miles distant, in the narrow corner of it consecrated to Protestant interments, is a plain, white-marble tomb. The inscription on it consists of only two initial letters, and the date of a year. It is the grave of Lucy Chard.


KATARINA ORSINI.

It was a sunny day, in sunny Italy. A picturesque dwelling, half palace, half villa, three parts ruin, rose in the midst of extensive grounds. Pleasure-grounds once, and luxuriantly beautiful; but now, like the house, run to waste. The hand of time had left on all its defacing marks, and the owners were not rich enough to arrest effectually its ravages. A small space just around the house was kept in order: a few of the rooms were retained as habitable.

Those rooms and the cultivated portion of the garden displayed a luxury that untravelled people in our own land have never seen or dreamt of; all else told of utter neglect, of extreme poverty. One room, it was the state saloon, large and lofty, and opening on a white marble colonnade, was shaped as an octagon. Gilded mirrors, a mosaic floor, chaste statues of alabaster, carvings of ivory, inlaid tables, ottomans and foot-mats of rich and costly velvet, delicate vases holding flowers, and a few exquisite pictures, caught

the eye and pleased the taste. Without, below this white marble colonnade, the rich green foliage of the trees blended with brilliant-hued flowers. Shady green banks afforded a grateful shelter; life-like statues were again seen here, carved from the marbles of Pentelicus; whilst the spray of a fountain, falling into its basin with a rippling murmur, whispered of delicious coolness in the noonday heat. A stranger, walking about the streets of the Eternal City, in its dirty narrow bye-ways, and gazing up at its dull palaces, some of them ugly-looking enough, all their windows closely shut against the light and the sun, might scarcely have said she could own so enchanting a spot. For this half-ruined villa-palace, enclosed within its own walls, was not situated in Rome's most favoured part.

Sitting on the white steps that led down to the fountain, listlessly dropping rose-leaves, one by one, into its glistening waters, was a lovely young girl of eighteen. Her features were pale and faultless, her dark brown eyes shone with a gentle light, her hair was soft as silken threads. There she sat, casting in the rose-leaves to the little fish, humming scraps of songs under her breath, talking to some gay birds that hung aloft in a gilded cage, and wondering lazily where Maria was. Thus amusing herself, she sat on until the sun went down.



"Katarina," called out a voice from the house, speaking the name gently, "the hours are advancing: come in."

"It is pleasant here, mother mine," answered the girl.

"Child, come in, I say. The evening miasma will be rising."

"Nay, but it does not penetrate here," returned Katarina.

"It does, Katarina. It was nothing but that fatal malaria which destroyed my sister. *She* sat out in it, as you think you may sit. Its breath struck her down, and ere the week's end they were chanting over her the requiem for the dead. Child, linger not."

Katarina obeyed, smiling: the young are ever carelessly sanguine. In the state saloon her mother sat, engaged in some light lace work; her sister listlessly stood by one of the alabaster pillars. Maria was by a year the senior of the two girls, but she looked older than her age: maidens ripen fast under a generous sun. Her style of beauty was rare, for her face was of dazzling fairness, her hair like threads of fine gold, and her eyes were blue as are Italia's skies. Of lofty and graceful form, admiration followed her wherever she appeared, and the fame of Maria Orsini's beauty was already rife in the high coteries of Rome. The younger one, Katarina, slight and small of stature, of

manners retiring, of bearing gentle, attracted less notice.

They were the children of the Count and Countess Orsini. It was a remote branch of the great Orsini family: an *obscure* branch, as compared with those high and mighty people. The Count and Countess Orsini possessed all the pride and pretension of their race: and possessed it the more, perhaps, from the consciousness of the fact that they were in a degree looked down upon by their distant relatives. The count was poor, the count moreover was an ungenial-mannered man, the countess was inclined to be quarrelsome. The countess, of weakly health, of retiring tastes, would never willingly have quitted her home: and so, what with his unpopularity and her dislike to society, they had fallen very much out of the world.

But this had to be changed when their two beautiful daughters came home from the convent where they had been educated. The only son, heir to the dilapidated estates, was just now away. It was necessary in the fulfilment of the obligations pertaining to their state and rank, that Maria and Katarina Orsini should enter into society: therefore the countess had to break through the shell of her home retirement, and appear in the great world. And with two daughters so attractive to introduce to it, it need not be said that

the world welcomed her. But some months had elapsed now since the young ladies' introduction, and the chief aim and end that was expected to come of it had not been achieved by either: a desirable marriage. A rather considerable sum of money had been set aside as their portions, and the two young ladies were heiresses in a moderate way: but their father had distinctly told each of them that unless she made a suitable marriage, one that would satisfy his ambition, not a stiver of it should she inherit. It was in his power to bestow it as he would. If his daughters failed to make a suitable match, they would be re-consigned to their convent home, there to take the veil.

Launched into the gaieties of the Romish city, the girls had already become fond of its attractions, Maria especially so. Her beauty was something new and rare, and the adulation it brought was all too welcome to Maria Orsini. Two suitors had come forward for her favour: but the one was not deemed wealthy enough, and the other not of sufficiently good descent to aspire to the hand of an Orsini. Maria was every whit as proud as her father, cold and ambitious.

There was a *réunion* this night at the Capella Palace. The Princess di Capella, of high rank and in high favour at the Court of the Vatican, was holding another fête in honour of her son. He, the Prince di Capella, had been travelling for two years in France

and in the north, as the Italians style our land ; and now that he had returned, his mother hoped he would settle down and take unto himself a wife. She was giving a succession of entertainments on a princely scale in his honour : this was the fourth. And yet, she could scarcely afford the cost ; for the Capellas, like the Orsinis, were not rich. The Orsinis had been bidden to the first. It had not been the princess's intention to invite them to the rest, but the young prince had insisted. He had been struck, fascinated, with the beauty of Maria. The proud Princess di Capella assented petulantly, observing that they did but serve to crowd her reception-rooms : she deemed that she condescended greatly to that inferior branch of the Orsinis.

Conspicuous in beauty, in stature, in grace, stood Maria Orsini amidst the gay and courtly throng. The Prince di Capella seemed to think so, for he hovered by her side perpetually. *He* could not boast of beauty : an undersized man with a weazened insignificant face, and an obstinate head adorned with straight black hair. What mattered that ? The high-born Prince di Capella, for whose favour every mother in the Eternal City was running a race, hoping to call him son-in-law, for whose notice nearly ever daughter was longing, needed not the additional charm of personal attractions.

On this evening, whilst Maria was treading a measure hand in hand with the prince, Katarina stood on the enclosed terrace amidst the orange trees. One whom she had hoped to see in the gay throng, was not visible. Her heart was beating, her spirit sinking, when he stole up to her—a tall, fair, handsome man, with an attractive face, a winning countenance, and honest faith shining forth from his large grey eyes. The rush of colour to her cheeks, and her start of glad surprise, told a tale.

“Giovanni!” she cried, in a soft, tremulous voice. “It is you!”

“Call me plain John,” he answered in English; his whole face lighted up with a smile, as he touched her gloved hand.

“I thought you had not come,” she said, changing her language to his: which she spoke well.

“I was detained, writing letters. Katarina, the plot is thickening,” he gaily added in a jesting tone. “I shall not be able to stay here much longer: I am wanted at home.”

“But you will return, Giovanni!” she whispered, with hesitation.

“Certainly; and to set up my tent in Italy for good: for a part of the year, that is. If I may be allowed. And I must put the question at rest, my Katarina, before starting.”

Her eyes fell beneath the ardent gaze of his. Side by side they wandered further down the terrace, where the lights were paler, the orange trees thicker; and there he talked to her of his plans, which looked so full of hope, for love gave to them its own rosy colouring.

John St. Arno was the younger son of a good family. Originally Italian, the St. Arnos had some centuries ago settled in England; the first of them having been created a knight-banneret on the field of battle during the Wars of the Roses. You might see their names now on the list of England's baronets. John, travelling about for pleasure, had seen Katarina at the very first entertainment she went to. He was charmed with the sweet young girl, so unsophisticated and fresh from her convent life, and obtained an introduction to her mother. Since then, he and Katarina had considerably improved their acquaintanceship; the one being as little loth to do it as the other; and a tacit engagement now existed between them.

John St. Arno had a competence: but the family estates had devolved with the title upon his elder brother—who was the very opposite of good and attractive John, and not over well-conducted: spent his days on racecourses and his nights in gambling-houses. Maria, who, with all her coldness, her pride, and her ambition, was attached to her sister, had

sounded her mother upon the feasibilities of Katarina's hopes. The countess, liking John St. Arno much, opined that the count would make no objection to him, provided he would undertake to have a house in Rome and spend with Katarina a portion of every year there. This piece of hopeful information Katarina, with many blushes, was disclosing now to him under the shade and scent of the orange trees.

Impulsive, open, and hearty in all he did, John St. Arno hastened to the Countess Orsini on the spur of the moment, and found her on a sofa in one of the more remote of the reception-rooms.

Taking a seat by her side, he, for the first time in his life, spoke to her of his love for Katarina, and of the plans they had ventured to form. The countess did not discourage him; but she impressed upon him the fact that the decision rested entirely with her husband.

"I think the count cannot object to me on the score of descent," said John to her. "It is very ancient; and originally, you know, we came from Italy."

"Which must account for your speaking our language as we do," observed the simple-minded countess.

"Not exactly," answered John, laughing. "But our family have always deemed it right to keep up

their original tongue. I am not rich," he added, returning to the question, "but——"


"But indeed you will be fairly rich," she interrupted. "Katarina has her fortune, you know. Yours and hers united will be very good. If she had none, I am sure the count would object to you; for your means are not sufficient to keep up the state he will insist upon for his daughters. I must say I should like you for my son-in-law, Signor St. Arno: but if Katarina had no fortune to add to your own means, you might ask for her in vain."

"That would be very cruel. Hardly, as it seems to me, just."

"All the same, you could not then be allowed to pretend to her. The count's will is no more to be altered than were the laws of the Medes and Persians. You—you will not seek to turn Katarina from her faith?" added the countess, after a pause.

"Certainly not. Rather would I encourage her to be steadfast to it: it is the faith she has been reared in; the faith of her people. Dear lady, our worship may differ in form, but not in aim and end. If each did not lead alike to heaven, what would become of the numbers that have already died in the one or the other?"

The Princess di Capella came sweeping into the room with a train of followers, and John St. Arno quitted the sofa.



"Where did you manage to hide yourself all the evening, Katarina?" asked Maria when they had returned home and were alone.

"I was—a good deal out on the terrace; the saloons were hot," answered Katarina, somewhat evasively, arousing herself from deep thought. Now that the realization of her dreams appeared almost assured, she trembled with instinctive fear. What if her stern father did not approve? She knew his coldness and his pride. John had whispered to her that he should call to see him on the morrow: Katarina, all in a flutter, had begged him *not* to come; but to let her mother break it to the count first.

"Maria," she said timidly, if—if a suitor appeared for you, should you not consider it more desirable that mamma—who is so indulgent to us—should speak to papa before *he* spoke?"

Maria Orsini opened her haughty blue eyes at the question.

"Why so, Katarina?"

"That he—that papa might not be surprised or shocked into passionate anger. He is sometimes, you know."

"Surprised he might be had he previously no idea that the proposal would be made. But how could such a thing startle him?"

"It might, if the applicant were not rich and great."

"Well then, what would it signify to us if papa did go into one of his passions? Justly so too, I should say."

"But, Maria, suppose—suppose it was some one whom you wished papa to receive well, and to say yes to?"

"I never could or should wish it," haughtily remarked Maria Orsini. "A suitor neither rich nor great! You are dreaming, child."

"They used to say in the convent that your reigning sin was ambition; the good sisters often told you so; and in that you take after the Orsinis. But, if it came about that you really cared for *one*, you might forget your ambition then."

"Never could I care for one for whom it was necessary I should sacrifice my ambition; I could not so far forget what is due to myself. But, Katarina, why are you saying all this? your voice betrays a meaning."

"If I confess why, perhaps you may ridicule me, Maria. Everybody is not the Prince di Capella."

"Not I, child," laughed Maria; "I never ridicule you. If there be one individual who is dearer to me than all the rest of the world, who is first with me always, it is my little sister."

"Nay, not *first*, Maria. Our father and mother must be that."

"Circumstances alter cases," said Maria, in her worldly wisdom. "We have been away from them for many years, seeing them only at intervals; whilst you and I have been together always. But now, what is it you wish to tell me?"

"You know a little about it already, Maria. John St. Arno—"

"Oh," interposed Maria, slightly, for who was John St. Arno, compared with the high and mighty prince whose attentions to her could not now be mistaken? "I quite forgot all about him, child."

"I—I think he is coming to ask for me, to-morrow."

"He! Well, yes, I know you and he have been talking together; I have caught glimpses of him in the evenings among the crowd; but I have other things to think of, you see now, child. Coming to ask for you! John St. Arno! And you indeed wish it, Katarina?"

"What is there against him?"

"Nothing against himself individually, I suppose; and many a young signorina will envy you your good-looking bridegroom. But he has nothing *but* looks, Katarina mia. He has not any title to give you, not any ancient marble-pillared palace; not much wealth."

"To both of us these things are as nothing."

"Well, well, if you are satisfied. There will have

to be a dispensation, I suppose, because of his religion ; but papa does not care about those things. Or mamma much, either."

"Will papa object, think you, Maria?"

"I think not. Why should he? As mamma observed when I spoke of it to her, your fortune and his will make up a respectable income; and the St. Arnos have their lineage, and he is a favourite everywhere. Very fair, if you can bring your mind to it."


"Which you could not do," smiled Katarina.

Maria drew up her beautiful head. "I! An Orsini change her name for a St. Arno!"

"I am an Orsini too, Maria."

"Yes, child, but you have not the attributes of one. You are not an Orsini by nature, Katarina; neither is mamma. Only—she has fallen in with papa's ways of thought; and, you know, *l'abito e una seconda natura*."

Maria threw herself into the romance: and in the morning they talked of it with the countess. She anticipated no objection from the count, though she could never be sure which way his mind would turn. Katarina besought her to break a hint of it to him; and she, ever compliant, proceeded to the count's apartments at the other side of the house. And anxiously enough watched poor Katarina; but



when her mother came forth she wore a smiling face.

"He was a little unwilling at first," she said, "on the score of Mr. St. Arno's moderate income; but I ventured to remind him that it would not be very small when yours was added to it; and so, my dear child, it is all right."

The mid-day heat had not yet come on; and the two young ladies sat under the shade of the trees near the fountain, their favourite seat, dreamily conversing of Katarina's future. Not a shadow of fear rested on the girl's heart now.

"Will he want you to live half your time in England, I wonder, Katarina?"

"I wonder, will he? Perhaps not quite half, Maria. The four hot months, let us say. I will ask him."

"Hush, child! Hark!"

The sound of wheels had attracted Maria's attention. Katarina ran up the bank, from whence a corner of the approach could be discerned. She was full of curiosity: visitors rarely troubled them so early.

Maria laughed. "It is your Giovanni," she said. "He has lost no time."

"Nay; this sounds like a grand rumbling state-coach; Giovanni would not come in one," dissented Katarina. "Wait just an instant."

Almost as she spoke, she came running down again. A grave surprise sat on her face and lips.

"Maria, it is the carriage of the Princess di Capella. What can she want so early? What can she want here at all? It is not often that she condescends to visit us."

A self-satisfied smile parted Maria Orsini's proud lips. She toyed with the spray of orange blossom in the waist of her cool white morning dress, and glanced towards the saloon. But no princess appeared in it. Very soon, however, a serving-man crossed it, and glanced down to where the young ladies sat.

"Jacopo," cried out Katarina in a half-whisper, "did not the Princess di Capella come here but a minute ago?"

Yes, the princess had come, Jacopo answered. She had asked for the count, not for the ladies. Jacopo had conducted her to the count's saloon, and was now looking for his mistress to inform her of the visit.

"What can it mean—that she should ask for papa?" cried Katarina. "The princess—you look conscious! Oh, Maria!"

An idea had suddenly flashed over the young girl, bringing with it a kind of dismay. Maria Orsini made no reply, save by the proud self-conscious smile.

"Does she come from the prince?—as his messenger?" breathlessly asked Katarina.

"I think it may be so."

"Oh, Maria, you have known him so short a period of time!"

"Quite long enough," significantly returned Maria.

"Well—if you think so, and can like him, I am very glad. But what a position for you!" she added. "Wife of the Prince di Capella! Second to few in Rome! I cannot realize it."

"Why cannot you?"

"And I to be only the wife of plain John St. Arno!" she added, with a merry laugh. "I would not exchange husbands with you, princess. Dear Maria, do not be angry with me: that slipped out unawares."

"Angry! Why should I be? That will not anger me, child. You marry a handsome man but a nobody. I marry rank and become a princess. It is the destiny each would have chosen."

"Very true," murmured Katarina.

"As a man, I think the Capella inferior to most men," calmly went on Maria; "as a prince he looks down upon them. One cannot have everything, Katarina. Non v'e rosa senza spina."

"True," again murmured Katarina. "Has he talked to you of this? Did he tell you last night?"

"Tell me!" echoed Maria, in ridicule of the words, but not of her sister. "We patricians do not manage

these matters as do your plebeians, Katarina. He has never opened his princely lips to me on the subject."

"Yet you seem to guess at the errand here of the princess!"

"Because I have seen that his admiration of me is serious. Princes don't act on impulse and 'tell their love,' as your simple English John told his; they proceed in harmony with the rules of etiquette. In entering on negotiations for the marriage of the Prince di Capella, it is his mother who would open them: therefore I suspect that may be the object of her visit to papa. I suspect also," added Maria, slightly laughing, "that the two have had a battle this morning, and that she has come forth with an ill grace."

"Battle about what?"

"His conferring the honour of his hand upon me. I am sure she has been *afraid* of it, Katarina. I have read it in her manner."

"Then I wonder she yielded."

"Depend upon it she could not help herself. The prince is not legally under her control; and he is one, if I judge him arightly, who brooks not opposition to his will, even from his mother."

"Maria, I don't believe that you care for him!"

"Not at all. But I shall be the Princess di Capella."

Maria was quite right in her conjectures. The

Princess di Capella had come with a formal demand for Maria Orsini's hand for her son; and there had been previously an unpleasant scene of dispute between them, in which she had tried to turn him in his purpose, and tried in vain. But the princess could not raise so great a scandal in Rome as to suffer him to marry without her consent—and that he deliberately said he would do if she withheld it. So here she had come, unwillingly, haughtily resolved to make the best of a bad bargain.

It had been well that she had never come! It had been well that the Prince di Capella had not set his mind on Maria Orsini! For now was about to be enacted one of those deeds of cruelty, one of those most crying wrongs, that are all but unknown in our own free land. A deed that never could be justifiable in the sight of honest man or of heaven.

The Princess di Capella, casually alluding to her son's revenues, so slender in proportion to his rank, had demanded of the Count Orsini that the whole of the money intended as the portion of the two sisters should be bestowed upon Maria: in short, she made it the condition of her own consent to the match.

Will it be believed that the Count Orsini acquiesced? Acquiesced without a single word of remonstrance? Elated at the proud prospect opening to his elder and favourite daughter—a higher one than even *he*, with

all his ambition, had dared seriously to contemplate—what mattered it that, to assure its realization, his youngest child must be sacrificed?

“Only her fortune! that does not sacrifice herself!” cries the reader, who may be unfamiliar with the policy obtaining amid some of the high-class Italian families. “Her straightforward English lover will get over the injustice, and take her without her dower.”

And John St. Arno would have done it, have taken her gladly, rather than lose her. But he was not allowed to do it, and the injustice involved the sacrifice of herself. Katarina was condemned to a convent for life.

When there may be two, or more, daughters in a family, and the sum allotted as their marriage portions (perhaps not large at best) is bestowed upon one, generally the eldest, to enable her to form a high alliance, the others may not marry. It is assumed that, fortuneless, they could only wed to sink into obscurity, and the family pride cannot permit that. Therefore the veil of a nun is the imperative alternative; and such was the fate allotted to poor Katarina.

But she had an hour or two yet of hope and love spared to her. Even while the Princess di Capella was still with the count, for their interview was a prolonged one, Mr. St. Arno called. Katarina chanced to be alone in the shady seat by the fountain, Maria

having strolled into the grotto at the end of the cypress grove; he saw her from the saloon and went out to her. They had at least three minutes together before the countess appeared; and Katarina, yielding to his questions, and blushing rosy love-blushes, whisperingly confessed that her father would make no objection.

Later, when the princess had departed—and she went without condescending to see the countess or even Maria, Mr. St. Arno sought and obtained an audience of the count. It was a very short one indeed: for, when Katarina thought that it could hardly have begun, she heard the Count Orsini's own man conducting Mr. St. Arno to the door.

"He might have come to tell all to me and mamma," thought Katarina.

The time went on to evening. The countess and her daughters were engaged to some festivity; but when the young ladies were about to prepare for it, Katarina was told she was not to go.

"Why and wherefore?" merrily questioned the young girl.

"Your father wishes you to remain with him this evening," was the mother's answer, as she turned her steps away. She knew the poor child's destined fate now: but, Italian mother though she was, she shrank from being the one to impart it. Katarina acquiesced

with a conscious smile. She supposed the count was going to talk to her of her future life as John St. Arno's wife, and perhaps lecture her on the score of behaving herself in it.

"Very well, mother mine, then I must remain at home," she cheerfully said. "Maria, dear, let me dress you this evening, instead of Ionie! I will turn you out as befits the promised bride of the heir of all the Capellas."

But how terribly was poor Katarina's happy mood changed ere one short hour had passed! She understood now why she had not been permitted to go forth to the evening's gaiety. A young girl destined to immediate seclusion is not allowed to mix in the world's folly. Like a marble statue stood she in the saloon alone, leaning against one of its alabaster pillars, the dread interview with her father over; yes, more like a statue than a living being. Her mother and sister found her there on their return at midnight.

"Katarina, why did you remain up?" cried the mother, sharply.

"Oh, my poor Katarina!" breathed Maria, tenderly clasping her sister in her arms. "I am so grieved!—so wounded! Not a bit of enjoyment have I had to-night for thinking of you. Mamma told me all in the carriage as we went along."

"I dared not say a word of remonstrance to my

father," panted poor Katarina, hardly able to speak from emotion. "Mother, I can to *you*. Won't you save me from this dreadful fate?"

"Dear child, dear Katarina, there is no help for it!" bewailed the countess, her own heart feeling half broken, for she did love her children. "The princess was haughty and exacting: your father never saw a woman of more determined will. They were the only terms on which she would sue for Maria's hand; and she would scarcely do it even with them."

"Were *I* asked to marry at the sacrifice of my sister, I would trample on the proposals of the one who could bring them to me," cried Katarina, with agitation, as she looked at Maria. "*I* would not rise upon another's death."

"Death!" echoed the countess. "You are raving, my poor Katarina."

"Not so, mother. It will be as death," she passionately added. "Nay, death would be more welcome to me now than life at the convent."

"Why, child! You were so happy there!"

"Yes, *as* a child: as a girl who had no experience beyond its ways and its walls. Had you and my father wished me to rest contented there, you should not have removed me from it, mother. You should not have allowed to me the pleasures of the world, or—or—the society of Giovanni St. Arno."

"The world is full of cares, Katarina."

"Not more so for me than for others. Maria may have her share of them, high though her position will be. And, whatever cares might have come to me, my husband would have shared them."

"Cease, cease, Katarina; your language is unbecoming a young maiden," said the countess, fractionously: the trouble, which she was so powerless to remedy, was setting all her nerves ajar. "Husband, forsooth! It were better that Giovanni St. Arno had been at the bottom of the Tiber, rather than sojourning in Rome," she added, in her vexation. "But for him you would not have objected to return to the convent. And why should you object? You know that you were happy in it for many years."

"But, mother, dear mother, do you not see how different it is? Then I was a light-hearted, careless girl, a boarder with Maria and the other girls. Now I am to be a nun, immured within it, solitary and alone, to the end."

The countess fidgeted as she stood, but made no reply. There *was* a difference. So stupendous a one that her mind could, perhaps, scarcely realize it.

Maria had sat down and was crying bitterly. Katarina, turning to her on sudden impulse, knelt and clasped her knees.

"Maria, if you will, you can save me. Give up the

prince. You know you do not care for him. Other suitors will present themselves to one so beautiful and popular as you; some of them, no doubt, as desirable as he, and who may be so wealthy that my poor little portion will be overlooked by them. Oh, mother mine, urge it upon her! Let her save me!"

"I did think of it at first—I did indeed," sobbed Maria. "But—my mother says it may not be."

"I said it was *impossible* that it could be," corrected the countess, with emphasis. "It is impossible. Maria's intended marriage has been publicly announced—and the contract is being drawn up."

Katarina started. "Publicly announced! Already?"

"Yes. The prince and Maria were congratulated together this evening. My poor Katarina, you must make the best of it! There is, alas, no alternative. You will go back to the convent on Monday next to enter upon your noviciate: the sooner you are away from the world now the better."

Katarina gave a startling cry. Maria, her eyes raining tears, bent over her, clasped, and kissed her. She was brimful of sympathy, brimful of pity; but of justice she had none. Though, perhaps, she could not help herself more than could her sister: the system was to blame, not Maria Orsini. Her marriage with the Prince di Capella was decreed, and she knew that it could not be set aside.

Katarina also knew it. Anguish had taken possession of her. She lay in Maria's arms as one bereft of life; she passed the night in all the agonies of hopeless despair. Never again to see John St. Arno! Never again to have any hope, or aim, or part in earthly life! And the world had been looking so bright, so fair!

The following day all the talk in Rome was of the approaching nuptials of the Prince di Capella with Maria Orsini, and of the coming seclusion of Katarina.

"It is the most unholy thing I ever heard of!" cried Mr. St. Arno, standing with his arms folded before Katarina, and speaking with suppressed anger. "You are to be secluded for the rest of your days because your sister must make a grand marriage!"

It was again evening. And the countess and Maria had again gone forth into the gay world. The count was shut up in his remote apartments, as he loved to be, and here was John St. Arno standing with Katarina. Liberal to a degree, as many Englishmen are, he had long ago won the heart of Ionie by his gifts; and the waiting-maid had listened to his pleading prayer this evening and ushered him into the presence of her young lady.

"But only for five minutes, you understand, signor," whispered Ionie. "You would not cause me to

lose my place? And, if this were known, I should lose it."

Katarina was on the balcony when he entered; her sad eyes, fixed on the stars shining in the deep blue sky of night, seemed to be asking whether heaven could be, indeed, that place of mercy which she had been taught to believe. Startled by the unexpected appearances of her lover, she cried out, shivered, and burst into a flood of tears. For the first time in his life he dared to put his arm round her, essaying to soothe her grief.

Just a few moments of explanation—he telling of the strangely-cool manner in which the count had received him the previous day, refused to listen to a word of his proposals for Katarina, curtly observing that it was not intended she should marry either him or any other man; she confirming the words, and assuring him that the report of her being about to be consigned to the convent for life was all too true a one.

"But surely you do not consent, Katarina?"

"I have no other choice."

That vexed him. He drew away a step and folded his arms, speaking with sternness. Poor Katarina leaned her head against the side of the balcony, and cried in silence.

"Oh, my dear, this must not be!" he resumed, his love resuming its sway again, compassion in his tender

tones. "Do you realize what it will be for you?—a death in life."

"Yes. But there's no help for me in all the world."

"Is there not? Would you not rather be my wife, Katarina?"

She lifted her hands as if the question agonized her. "Why speak of it, Giovanni? It cannot be."

"Do you think the count, although he is your father, has any *right* to consign you to this living tomb? Answer me, my love."

"But he has the power," said poor Katarina.

John coughed. "I must save you from it."

She passed her hand over her eyes and looked at him. He save her! What cruel nonsense it was to say it!

"I will take you away with me to free England, and make you my wife the day we get there," he whispered. "Your future life, instead of being a lost waste, shall be one of usefulness, of sweet happiness."

"Oh, don't, don't, Giovanni! That is only a fable, you know."

"Well, yes; only a fable, of course. Let us see how we could work it out. Just for pastime."

"It will but make the reality more cruel."

"We get away from here, you and I," he continued, paying no attention to her words. "To-morrow evening, let us say; this is Wednesday; or the next

evening at farthest. A dear old English friend of mine, who is in Rome and who was as a sister to my mother during her lifetime, will go with us and take care of you. I know I have but to ask her. You have seen her, Katarina: Mrs. Mann."

"But why tell the fable?" sobbed Katarina.

"We will make for Civita Vecchia. Vessels of some kind or other are always to be had there for money. And until then, until we are on the good safe waters and have left Italia's shores behind us, you shall appear to be Mrs. Mann's maid, and wear a peasant's dress. I'll go to the masquerade stores and choose the dress myself, cap and ear-rings and all. We touch at the first safe shore we come to, and hasten on by land to London. On the same day that we arrive there our marriage shall take place, according to the rites of my faith and of yours. Or, should the latter demand preparations or delay, you go to Mrs. Mann's home after you have been to our church with me, until all shall be in readiness. A fable easy of enactment, Katarina."

"But still only a fable, Giovanni."

"Wait a bit. We settle down after our marriage in some charming retreat, and petition your parents for their forgiveness until it is accorded. I am not rich, Katarina; but I have enough for comfort, and your life shall be bright as one long summer's day.

Oh, my darling!" he added, drawing her nearer to him, and his voice to her sounded sweeter than any earthly music, "which will be best? This blissful, rational life with me, or to be buried alive in the convent?"

Was she realizing the terrible contrast in her mind? Did the picture he drew of what her future might be with him cause her heart to flutter and her mind to waver? She sobbed softly.

"It could not be, Giovanni. I could never get away, I am sure. And oh, what a dreadful scandal it would make in Rome!"

"And all Rome would say Katarina Orsini has done wisely. You can serve your Master better as a free woman than as a secluded one, my Katarina. Ay, and live more actively for heaven."

"I should be excommunicated," said she, trembling from head to foot.

"There's no such thing known as excommunication over yonder, so you could not be. Excommunication does not hold good in England. My darling, be at rest. Let me save you!"

A tap at the door. Enter Ionie. She had come to say that she had only accorded five minutes to the signor, and at least twenty had elapsed. She had stood all the while upon frightful thorns in the passage, and the signor must certainly go.

"Upon condition that you let me in for five minutes

this time to-morrow," said he. "Five minutes really, you know, Ionie. It will be long enough for me to arrange matters for the next evening," he whispered to Katarina. "Keep up your heart till then, my darling!"

All Rome was scandalized. The young Signorina Orsini had mysteriously disappeared. So had John St. Arno. But some three or four days went on before any one thought to connect the disappearance of the one with that of the other: and then it was discovered that good old Mrs. Mann, with her train of trusty servants, made part of the travelling party. And the programme, sketched out by John so deftly, was luckily carried out, the marriage ending it.

And before eight months had gone by, the Count and Countess Orsini, implacable until then, graciously accorded their forgiveness to the offenders, and the young Princess di Capella added an invitation to them to come and visit her at the Capella Palace. For John St. Arno had succeeded to the family title and estates, through the death of his random brother; and Katarina, no longer to be despised and condemned, was Lady St. Arno.



THE SELF-CONVICTED.

I.

It was a wild, boisterous evening at the commencement of winter. The wind, howling in fearful gusts, swept the earth as with a whirlwind, booming and rushing with a force seldom met with in an inland county. The rain descended in torrents, pattering against the window-panes, especially against those of a solitary farm-house, situated several miles from the city of Worcester. In fact, it seemed a battle between the wind and the rain which should treat the house most roughly, and the wind had the best of it. It roared in the chimneys, it shook the old gables on the roof, burst open the chamber casements, and fairly unseated the weathercock from its perch on the barn. The appearance of the dwelling would seem to denote that it belonged to one of the middle class of agriculturists. There was no finery about it, inside or out, but plenty of substance. A large room, partaking

partly of the parlour, partly of the hall, and somewhat of the kitchen, was the general sitting-room; and in this apartment, on this same turbulent Friday evening, sat, knitting by firelight, a middle-aged lady, homely, but very neat, in her dress.

"Eugh!" she shuddered, as the wind roared and the rain dashed against the windows, which were only protected by inside shutters, "what a night it is! I wish to goodness Robert would come home."

Laying down her knitting, she pushed the logs together on the hearth, and was resuming her employment, when a quiet, sensible-looking girl, apparently about one or two and twenty, entered. Her features were not beautiful, but there was an air of truth and good-nature pervading them more pleasing than beauty.

"Well, Jane," said the elder lady, looking up, "how does she seem now?"

"Her ankle is in less pain, mother," was the reply, "but it appears to me that she is getting feverish. I gave her the draught."

"A most unfortunate thing!" ejaculated Mrs. Armstrong. "Benjamin at home ill, and now Susan must get doing some of his work, that she has no business to attempt, and falls down the loft, poor girl, and sprains her ankle. Why could she not have trusted to Wilson? I do believe," broke off Mrs. Armstrong,

abruptly, and suspending her knitting to listen, "that your father is coming. The wind howls so that one can scarcely hear, but it sounds to me like a horse's hoofs."

"I do not think it is a horse," returned Jane. "It is more like some one walking round to the house-door."

"Well, child, your ears are younger than mine; it may be as you say."

"I hope it is not Darnley!" cried Jane, involuntarily.

"Jane," rebuked her mother, "you are very obstinate to persist in this dislike of a neighbour. A wealthy young man with a long lease of one of the best farms in the county over his head is not to be sneezed at. What is there to dislike in James Darnley?"

"I—I don't know that there is anything particularly to dislike in him," hesitated Jane, "but I cannot see what there is to like."

"Don't talk foolishly, but go and open the door," interposed Mrs. Armstrong. "You hear the knocking."

Jane made her way to the house-door, and, withdrawing the chain and bolt, a rush of wind, a shower of rain, and a fine-looking young man sprang in together. The latter clasped Jane round the waist, and—if the truth must be told—brought his lips into contact with hers.

"Hush, hush, Ronald," she whispered; "my mother is in the hall alone; what if she should hear!"

"I will fasten the door," was all the answer she received. And Jane disengaged herself, and walked towards the hall.

"Who is it?" asked Mrs. Armstrong, as her daughter reappeared. "Mr. Darnley?"

"It is Ronald Payne," answered Jane, in a timid voice.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Armstrong, in a very short tone. "Get those shirts of your father's, Jane, and look to the buttons; there they lie, on the sideboard. And light the candles: you cannot see to work by fire-light."

"How are you, Mrs. Armstrong?" inquired the young man, in cheerful tones, as he entered and seated himself on the opposite side of the large fireplace. "What an awful night! I am not deficient in strength, but it was as much as I could do to keep my feet coming across the land."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Armstrong, plying her knitting-needles with great energy; "you would have been better at home."

"Home is dull for me now," was the answering remark of Ronald Payne. "Last winter my poor mother was alive to bear me company, but this, I have no one to care for."

"Go upstairs, Jane, and see if Susan has dropped asleep," interrupted Mrs. Armstrong, who did not seem

to be in the most pleasant humour, "and as you will have the beds to turn down to-night, you can do that."

Jane rose, and departed on her errand.

"And lonely my home is likely to be," continued Ronald, "until I follow good example and marry."

"It would be the very thing for you, Mr. Payne," replied the lady. "Why don't you set about it?"

"I wish I dare. But I fear it will take time and trouble to win the wife I should like to have."

"There's a great deal of trouble in getting a wife—a good one; as for the bad ones, they are as plentiful as blackberries. There have been two or three young blades wanting to be after Jane," continued the shrewd Mrs. Armstrong, "but I put a stop to them at once, for she is promised already."

"Promised!" echoed Ronald.

"Of course she is. Her father has promised her to Mr. Darnley; and a good match it will be."

"A wretched sacrifice," exclaimed Payne, indignantly. "Jane hates him."

"How do you know that?" demanded Mrs. Armstrong, sharply.

"I hate him too," continued the excited Ronald.

"I wish he was a thousand miles away."

And the conversation continued in this strain until Jane returned, when another loud knocking at the house-door was heard above the wind.

"Allow me to open it," cried Mr. Payne, starting up; and a second stranger entered the sitting-room.

"How are you, Mr. Darnley? I am very glad to see you," was the cordial salutation of Mrs. Armstrong. "Come to the fire; and, Jane, go and draw a tankard of ale. Susan has managed to sprain her ankle to-night, and cannot stir a step," she explained. "An unlucky time for it to happen, for our indoor man went home ill three days ago, and is not back yet. Did you ever know such weather?"

"Scarcely," returned the new-comer. "As I rode home from the fair, I thought the wind could not be higher, but it gets worse every hour."

"You have been to the fair, then?"

"Yes. I had a heavy lot of stock to sell. I saw Mr. Armstrong there; he was buying, I think."

"I wish he would make haste home," was Mrs. Armstrong's answer. "It is not a desirable night to be out in."

"A pretty prospect for going to Worcester market to-morrow!" observed Darnley.

"But need you go?"

"I shall go if it rains cats and dogs," was the gentleman's reply. "My business to-day was to sell stock—to-morrow, it will be to buy."

Jane entered with the silver tankard, its contents foaming above its brim like a mountain of snow, and

placed it on a small, round table between the two young men. They sat there, sipping the ale occasionally, now one, now the other, but angry words passed continually between them. Darnley was fuming at the evident preference Jane accorded to his rival, and Payne fretted and chafed at Darnley's suit being favoured by Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong. They did not quite come to a quarrel, but it was little short of it, and when they left the house together, it was in anything but a cordial humour.

"Jane, what can have become of your father?" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, as the door closed upon the two young men. "It is hard upon ten o'clock. How late it will be for him to go to Wilson's: he will have, as it is, to knock him up, for the man must have been in bed an hour ago."

Now it is universally known that farmers in general, even the most steady, have an irresistible propensity to yield to one temptation—that of taking a little too much on a fair or market night. Mr. Armstrong was not wholly exempt from this failing, though it was rare indeed that he fell into the snare. For a twelvemonth, at least, had his family not seen him the worse for liquor; yet, as ill-luck would have it, he came in on this night stumbling and staggering, his legs reeling one way, and his head flying another. How he got home was a mystery to Mrs. Armstrong;

and to himself also, when he came to his senses. As to making him comprehend that an accident had befallen Susan, and that in consequence he was wanted to go and tell some one of their outdoor men to be at the house early in the morning, it was not to be thought of. All that could be done with him was to get him upstairs—a feat that was at length accomplished.

“This is a pretty business, Jane!” cried the indignant Mrs. Armstrong. “You will be obliged to milk the cows in the morning, now.”

“Milk the cows!” returned Jane, aghast at the suggestion.


“What else can be done? Neither you nor I can go to tell Wilson at this time of night, and in such a storm; and the cows must be milked. You can milk, I suppose?”

“Oh, mother!” was Jane’s remonstrance.

“I ask if you can milk?” repeated Mrs. Armstrong, impatiently—she was by far too much put out to speak otherwise.

“I have never tried since I was a child,” was Jane’s reply. “I sometimes used to do it then, for pastime.”

“Then, my dear, you must do it once for use. It would be a mercy,” continued the excited lady, “if all the public-houses and their drinkables were at the bottom of the sea.”



Jane Armstrong was a girl of sound sense and right feeling. Unpalatable as the employment was, she nevertheless saw that it was her duty, under the present circumstances, to perform it; so she quietly made up her mind to the task, and requested her mother to call her at the necessary hour in the morning.

They were highly respectable and respected people, Robert Armstrong and his wife, though not moving in the sphere exclusive to gentlefolks. Jane had been brought up well. Perfectly conversant with all household duties, her education in other respects would scarcely have disgraced the first lady in the county—for it must be remembered that education then was not what it is now—and her parents could afford to spend money upon their only child. Amply she repaid them by her duty and affection. One little matter only did they disagree upon, and that not openly. Very indignant was Mrs. Armstrong at Ronald Payne's presuming to look up to her, and exceedingly sore did she feel with Jane for not checking this presumption. But she could urge nothing against Ronald, excepting that he was a poor, rather than a rich man, and that the farm he rented was regarded as an unproductive one. His pretensions created a very ill-feeling towards him in Mrs. Armstrong's mind, for she believed, that but for him, her

daughter would consent to marry the wealthy James Darnley, and so become mistress of his splendid farm.

Before it was light the next morning Jane left the house with her milk-pail. Only the faintest glimmer of dawn was appearing in the east. There was no rain, and the wind had dropped to a calm; but it was a cold, raw morning. Jane wrapped her woollen shawl closely round her, and made good speed.

The field in which the cow-sheds were situated was bounded on the left by a lonely lane, leading from the main road. It branched off in various directions, passing some of the farm-houses. Jane had reached the field, and was putting down her milk-pail, when a strange noise on the other side of the hedge caused her to start and listen.

A violent struggle, as for life or death, was taking place. A voice that was certainly familiar to her, twice called out "Murder!" with a shriek of agony, but heavy blows, seemingly from a club or other formidable weapon, soon silenced it, and some one fell to the earth amidst moans and groans of anguish.

"Lie there, and be still!" burst forth another voice, rising powerfully over the cries. "What! you are not finished yet! I have laid in wait for ye to a pretty purpose if ye be to escape me now. One! two! three!" and Jane shuddered and turned sick as she listened, for each sentence was followed by a blow

upon the prostrate form. The voice was totally strange to Jane—one that she had never heard in her life—and shocking blasphemy was mingled with the words.

Ere silence supervened, Jane, half stupefied with horror and fear, silently tore her thick shoes off her feet, leaving them where they were, in her agitation, and stole away on the damp path, gathering her clothes about her, so that not a sound should betray her presence to those on the other side. As she widened the distance between herself and that fearful scene, her speed increased; she flew, rather than ran, and entered her father's and mother's bedroom to fall senseless on the floor.

Later in the morning, when broad daylight had come, a crowd stood around the murdered man. The face was bruised and blood-stained, and the head had been battered to death; but there was no difficulty in recognizing the features of James Darnley. His pockets were turned inside out; they had been rifled of their contents, and a thick, knotted stick, covered with blood and hair, lay by his side. It was supposed he had a heavy sum about him in his pockets, but all had been abstracted.

And now came a question, first whispered amongst the multitude, but repeated louder and louder by indignant voices.

“Who is the murderer?”


"Ronald Payne," was the answer, deliberately uttered by a bystander. "I have just heard it from Mrs. Armstrong's own lips. They were at her house last night quarrelling and contending, and she *knows* he is the murderer."

"Ronald Payne!" echoed the crowd, with one universal accent of surprise and incredulity.

"As God is my Judge," cried the unhappy young man—for he was also present—"I am innocent of this deed!"

"You have long been upon ill terms," retorted the before-mentioned bystander—and it may be remarked that he was an acquaintance of Payne's; had never borne anything but kind feeling towards him. Yet now, so gratifying is it to the vain display and pride of human nature to be mixed up with one of these public tales of horror, he suddenly became his vehement accuser. "Mrs. Armstrong says that you left her house bickering with each other; and she heard you assert, before he was present, that you hated him, and wished he was a thousand miles away."

"That is all true," answered Ronald, turning his clear eye to the crowd, who now began to regard him with doubt. "We *were* bickering one with the other at Mrs. Armstrong's last night; not quarrelling, but talking *at* each other; but no ill words passed between us after we left the house. We walked peaceably



together, and I left him at his own door. I never set eyes upon him afterwards till I saw him here with you, lying dead."

Words of doubt, hints of suspicion, ran through the multitude, headed by the contumacious bystander: and Robert Payne's cheeks, as he listened, burnt like fire.

"How can you think I would have a hand in such an awful deed!" he indignantly exclaimed. "Can you look in my face and believe me one capable of committing murder?"

"Faces don't go for nothing, sir," interposed the constable, Samuel Dodd, who had come bustling up and heard the accusation made; "we don't take 'em into account in these matters. I am afeared, sir, it's my duty to put the ancuffs on you."

"Handcuff on me!" exclaimed Ronald, passionately.

"You may be wanted, sir, at the crowner's quest, and perhaps at another tribune after that. It is more than my office is worth to let you be at large."

"Do you fear I should attempt to run away?" retorted Ronald.

"Such steps have been heered on, sir," answered the constable; "and my office is give me, you see, to prevent such."

The idea of resistance rose irresistibly to the mind of Ronald Payne; but his better judgment came to

his aid, and he yielded to the constable, who was calling on those around to help to secure him in the king's name—good old George III.

"I resign myself to circumstances," was his remark to the officer, "and will not oppose your performing what is your apparent duty. Yet, oh! believe me," he added, earnestly, "I am entirely innocent of this foul deed—as innocent as you can be. I repeat, that I never saw James Darnley after I left him at his own house last night; and far from quarrelling during our walk home, we were amicably talking over farming matters."

When the constable had secured his prisoner in the place known as the "lock-up," he made his way to Mr. Armstrong's, intensely delighted at all the excitement and stir, and anxious to gather every possible gossip about it, true or untrue. Such an event had never happened in the place since he was sworn in constable. In Farmer Armstrong's hall were gathered several people, Sir John Seabury, the landlord of that and the neighbouring farms, standing in the midst.

Sir John was an affable man, and, as times went, a liberal landlord. It happened that he was then just appointed high sheriff of Worcestershire for the ensuing year, his name having been the one pricked by the king.

When the constable entered, all faces were turned



towards him. Several voices spoke, but Sir John's rose above the rest.

"Well, constable, what news?"

"He's in the lock-up, sir," was Mr. Sam Dodd's reply; "and there he'll be, safe and sound, till the crowner holds his quest."

"Who is in the lock-up?" asked Sir John, for the parties now present were not those who had been at the taking of Payne: *they* had flocked, one and all, to the "lock-up," crowd-like, at the heels of the constable and his prisoner. And Sir John Seabury, having but just entered, had not heard of Mrs. Armstrong's suspicion.

"Him what did the murder, sir," was the constable's explanatory answer, who had reasoned himself to the conclusion, as rural constables were apt to do in those days, that, because some slight suspicion attached to Payne, he must inevitably have committed it. "And he never said a word," exulted Mr. Dodd, "but he held out his hands for the ancuffs as if he knowed they'd fit. He only declared he waren't guilty, and walked along with his head up, like a lord, and not a bit o' shame about him, saying that the truth would come out sooner or later. It's a sight to see, gentlemen, the brass them murderers has, and many on 'em keeps it up till they's a-ridin' to the drop."

"How was it brought home to him?—who is it?" reiterated the baronet.

"It's young Mr. Payne," answered the officer, wiping his face, and then throwing the handkerchief into the hat, which stood on the floor beside him.

"Mr. Payne!" repeated Sir John Seabury, in astonishment; whilst Jane, never for a moment believing the words, but startled into anger, stood forward, and spoke with trembling lips.

"What are you talking about, constable? what do you mean?"

"Mean, miss! Why, it were young Mr. Payne what did the murder, and I have took him into custody."

"The constable says right," added Mrs. Armstrong. "There's not a doubt about it. He and Darnley were disputing here all last evening, and they left with ill-feeling between them. Who else can have done it?"

But she was interrupted by Miss Armstrong; and it should be explained that Jane, having just risen from the bed where they had placed her in the morning, had not until this moment known of the accusation against Payne. She turned to Sir John Seabury; she appealed to her father; she essayed to remonstrate with her mother; her anger and distress at length finding vent in hysterical words.

"Father! Sir John! there is some terrible mistake. Mother! how can you stand by and listen? I told

you the murderer was a stranger—I *told* you so : what do they mean by accusing Ronald Payne ? ”

Jane might have held her tongue, for instilled suspicion is a serpent that gains quick and sure ground, and perhaps there was scarcely one around her who did not think it probable that Payne was the guilty man. They listened to Jane’s reiterated account of the morning’s scene she had been an ear-witness to ; to her assertion that it was impossible Ronald Payne could have been the murderer ; but they hinted how unlikely it was, that in her terror, she was capable of recognizing or not recognizing voices ; and she saw she was not fully believed.

She found herself, subsequently, she hardly knew how, in their best parlour—a handsome room and handsomely furnished—alone with Sir John Seabury. She had an indefinite idea afterwards, that in passing the door she had drawn him in. He stood there with his eyes fixed on Jane, waiting for her to speak.

“ Oh, Sir John ! Sir John ! ” she cried, clinging to his arm in the agitation of the moment as she might cling to that of a brother, “ I see I am not believed ; yet indeed I have told the truth. It was a stranger who murdered Mr. Darnley.”

“ Certainly the voice of one we are intimate with is not readily mistaken, even in moments of terror,” was Sir John Seabury’s reply.

"It was an ill voice, a wicked voice; a voice that, independently of any accessory circumstances, one could only suppose belonged to a wicked man. But the language it used was awful: such that I had never imagined could be uttered."

"And it was a voice you did not recognize?"

"It was a voice I could not recognize," returned Jane, "for I had never until then heard it."

Sir John looked keenly at her. "Is this rumour correct that they have been now hinting at," he whispered—"you heard it as well as I—that there was an attachment between you and Ronald Payne? and that there was ill-feeling between him and Darnley in consequence?"

"I see even you do not believe me," cried Jane, bursting into tears. "There is an attachment between us: but do you think I would avow such attachment for a murderer? The man whom I heard commit the deed was a stranger," she continued earnestly; "and Ronald Payne was not near the spot at the hour."

"There is truth in your face, Miss Armstrong," observed Sir John, gazing at her

"And truth in my heart," she added.

And before he could prevent her, she had slipped towards the ground, and was kneeling on the carpet at the feet of Sir John.

"As truly as that I must one day answer before

the bar of God," she said, clasping her hands together, "so have I spoken now: and according to my truth in this, may God deal then with me! Sir John Seabury, do you believe me?"

"I do believe you, my dear young lady," he answered, the conviction of her honest truth forcing itself upon his mind. "And however this unfortunate business may turn out for Ronald Payne, in my mind he will be from henceforth an innocent and a wronged man."

"Can your influence not release him?" inquired Jane. "You are powerful."

"Impossible. I could do no more than yourself. He is in the hands of the law."

"But you can speak to his character at the coroner's inquest?" she rejoined. "You know how good it has always been."

Sir John kindly explained to her that all testimonials to character must be offered at the trial, should it be Payne's fate to be committed for one.

When further inquiries came to be instituted, it was found that Darnley had been roused from his slumbers, and called out of his house, about half-an-hour, perhaps less, before the murder was committed. The only person deposing to this fact was his house-keeper—a most respectable woman, who slept in the room over her master. She declared that she had

been unable to sleep in the early part of the night, feeling nervous at the violence of the wind; that towards morning she dropped asleep, and was awakened by a noise, and by some one shouting out her master's name. That she then heard her master open his window, and speak with the person outside, whoever it was; and that he almost immediately afterwards went downstairs, and out at the house-door.

"Who was it?" asked all the curious listeners. "And what did he want with Darnley?"

The housekeeper did not know. She thought the voice was that of a stranger; at any rate it was one she did not recognize. And she could not say what he wanted, for she had not heard the words that passed: in fact, she was but half awake at the time, and had thought it was one of the farm-servants.

The coroner's inquest was held, and the several facts already related were deposed to. Mrs. Armstrong's evidence told against, Jane's for, the prisoner. No article belonging to the unfortunate James Darnley had been found, saving a handkerchief, *and that was found in the pocket of Ronald Payne*. He accounted for it in this way. He left his own pocket-handkerchief, he said, a red silk one, by accident that night on the table at Mrs. Armstrong's—and this was proved to be correct; that when he and Darnley got

out, the wind was so boisterous they could not keep their hats on. Darnley tied his handkerchief over his. Payne would have done the same, but could not find it, so he had to hold his hat on with his hand. That when Darnley entered his house, he threw the handkerchief to his companion, to use it for the same purpose the remainder of his way, he having further to go than Darnley. And, finally, Payne asserted that he had put the handkerchief in his pocket upon getting up that morning, intending to return it to Darnley as soon as he saw him.

The handkerchief was produced in court. It was of white lawn, large and of fine texture, marked in full, "James Darnley."

"He was always a bit of a dandy, poor fellow," whispered the country rustics, scanning the white handkerchief: "especially when he went a-courting."

Ronald Payne, as one proof of his innocence, stated that he was in bed at the time the murder was committed. A man-servant of his, who slept on the same floor as himself, also deposed to this; and said that a labourer came to the house with the news that a man had been found killed, before his master came downstairs. But upon being asked whether his master could not have left his bedroom and the house in the night, and have subsequently returned to it without his knowledge, he admitted that such might have been the

case; though it was next to a "moral impossibility,"—such were his words—for it to have been done without his hearing.

But what was the verdict?—" *Wilful Murder against some person or persons unknown*;" for the jury and the coroner did not find the evidence sufficiently strong to commit Payne for trial. So he left the court a discharged man, but *not*, as the frequent saying runs, without a stain upon his character. Although the verdict, contrary to general expectation, was in his favour, the whole neighbourhood believed him guilty. And from that moment, so violent is popular opinion, whether for good or for ill, he was exposed to nearly all the penalties of a guilty man. A dog could scarcely have been more badly treated than was he; and, so far as talking against him went, Mrs. Armstrong headed the malcontents.

II.

So matters went on till the month of February. In the quiet dusk of one of its evenings, Jane Armstrong crept away from her house, and, taking a direction opposite to that where the murder was committed, walked quickly until her father's orchard was in view.

Crossing the stile of this, she turned to the right, and there stood Ronald Payne.

"This is kind of you, Jane," he said, as he seated her upon the stump of a felled tree, and placed himself beside her. "God bless you for this!"

"It is but little matter, Ronald, to be thanked for," she replied. "Perhaps it is not exactly what I ought to do, coming secretly to meet you here, but——"

"It is a great matter," he interrupted, bitterly. "I am now a proscribed man; a thing for boys to hoot at. It requires some courage, Jane, to meet a murderer."

"I *know* your innocence, Ronald," she answered, as, in all confiding affection, she leaned upon his bosom, while her tears fell fast. "Had you been tried—condemned—executed, I would still have testified unceasingly to your innocence."

"I sent for you here, Jane," he resumed, "to tell you my plans. I am about to leave this country for America. Perhaps I may there walk about without the brand upon my brow."

"Oh, Ronald!" she ejaculated, "is this your fortitude? Did you not promise me to bear this affliction with patience, and to hope for better days?"

"Jane, I did so promise you," replied the unhappy young man; "and if it were not for that promise, I should have gone long ago: but things get worse

every day, and I can no longer bear it. I believe if I remained here I should go mad. See what a life mine is! I am buffeted—trampled down—spit upon—shunned—jeered—deserted by my fellow-creatures; not by one, but by all: save you, Jane, there is not a human being who will speak with me. I would not so goad another, were he even a known murderer, whilst I am but a suspected one. I have not deserved this treatment—God knows I have not!” And suddenly breaking off, he bent down his head, and, giving way to the misery that oppressed him, for some moments sobbed aloud like a child.

“Ronald, dearest Ronald,” she entreated, “think better of this for my sake. Trust in——”

“It is useless, Jane, to urge me,” he interrupted. “I cannot remain in England.”

Again she tried to combat his resolution: it seemed useless. But, unwilling to give up the point, she wrung a promise from him that he would well reconsider the matter during the following night and day: and, agreeing to meet him on the same spot the next evening, she parted from him with his kisses warm on her lips.

“Where can Jane be?” exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, calling out, and looking up and down the house in search of her. “Robert, do you know?”

Mr. Armstrong knew nothing about it.

The lady went into the kitchen, where the two indoor servants were seated at their tea.

"Susan—Benjamin, do you know anything of Miss Jane?"

"She is up there in the orchard with young Mr. Payne, ma'am," interposed Ned, the carter's boy, who stood by.

"How do you know?" demanded Mrs. Armstrong, wrathfully.

"Because I brought her a message from him to go there. So I just trudged up a short while ago, and there I see 'em. He was a-kissin' of her or something o' that."

"My daughter with *him*!" cried Mrs. Armstrong, her face crimson, whilst Susan overbalanced her chair in her haste to administer a little wholesome correction to the bold-speaking boy. "My daughter with a murderer!"

"That's why I went up," chimed in the lad, dodging out of Susan's way. "I feared he might be for killin' Miss Jane as he killed t'other, so I thought I'd watch 'em a bit."

Away flew Mrs. Armstrong to her husband, representing the grievance with all the exaggeration of an angry woman. Loud, stinging denunciations from both greeted Jane upon her entrance, and she, miserable and heartbroken, could offer no resistance to the

anger of her incensed parents. It was very seldom Mr. Armstrong gave way to passion ; never with Jane ; but he did that night : and she, terrified and sick at heart, promised compliance with his commands never to see Ronald Payne again.

Here was another blow for the ill-fated young man. Whether he had wavered or not, after his previous interview with Jane, must remain unknown, but he now determined to leave England, and without loss of time. He went to Sir John Seabury, and gave up the lease of his farm. It was said that Sir John urged him to stop and battle out the storm ; but in vain. He disposed privately of his stock and furniture, and by the first week in March was on his way to Liverpool.

It was on the following Saturday that Jane Armstrong accompanied her father and mother to Worcester. She seemed as much like a person dead as alive ; and Susan said, in confidence to a gossip, that young Mr. Payne's untoward fate was breaking her heart. The city, in the afternoon, wore an aspect of gaiety and bustle far beyond that of the customary market-day, for the judges were expected in from Oxford to hold the assizes : a grand holiday then, and still a grand show for the Worcester people. Jane and her mother spent the day with some friends, whose residence was situated in the London Road, as it is called, the way

by which the judges entered the city. It has been mentioned that the high sheriff for that year was Sir John Seabury; and, about three o'clock, he went out with his procession to meet the judges, halting at the little village of Whittington until they should arrive.

It may have been an hour or more after its departure from the city that the sweet, melodious bells of the cathedral struck out upon the air, giving notice that the cavalcade had turned and was advancing; and, in due time, a flourish of trumpets announced its approach. The heralds rode first, at a slow and stately pace, with their trumpets, preceding a double line of javelin men in the sumptuous liveries of the Seaburys, their javelins in rest, and their horses, handsomely caparisoned, pawing the ground. A chaise, thrown open, followed, containing the governor of the county gaol, his white wand raised in the air; and then came the sheriff's carriage, an equipage of surpassing elegance, the Seabury arms shining forth on the panels, and its four stately steeds prancing and chafing at the deliberate pace to which they were restrained.

It contained only one of the judges, all imposing in his flowing wig and scarlet robes. The Oxford assizes not having terminated when he left, he had hastened on to open court at Worcester, leaving his learned brother to follow. Opposite to him sat Sir John

Seabury, with his chaplain in his gown and bands: and as Jane stood with her mother and their friends at the open window, the eye of their affable young landlord caught hers, and he leaned forward and bowed: but the smile on his face was checked, for he too surely read the worn and breaking spirit betrayed by Jane's. Some personal friends of the sheriff followed the carriage on horseback; and, closing the procession, rode a crowd of Sir John's well-mounted tenants, the portly person of Mr. Armstrong conspicuous in the midst. But when Mrs. Armstrong turned towards her daughter with an admiring remark on the pageantry, Jane was sobbing bitterly.

Mrs. and Miss Armstrong left their friends' house when tea was over, on their way to the inn used by Mr. Armstrong at the opposite end of the town. They were in High Street, passing the Guildhall; Jane walking dreamily forwards, and her mother gazing at the unusual groups scattered about it, though all signs of the recent cavalcade had faded away; when master Samuel Dodd, the constable, met them. He stood still, and addressed Jane.

"I think we have got the right man at last, Miss Armstrong. I suppose it will turn out, after all, that you were right about young Mr. Payne."

"What has happened?" faltered Jane.

"We have took a man, miss, on strong suspicions

that he is the one what cooked Mr. Darnley. We have been upon the scent this week past. You must be in readiness, ladies, for you'll be wanted on the trial, and it will come on next Tuesday or Wednesday. You'll get your summonses on Monday morning."

"Good heart alive, constable!" cried the startled Mrs. Armstrong. "You don't mean to say that Ronald Payne was innocent!"

"Why, ma'am, that have got to be proved. For my part, I think matters would be best left as they is, and not rake 'em up again. He have been treated so very shameful if it should turn out that he warn't guilty."

It was even as the constable said. A man had been arrested and thrown into the county gaol at Worcester, charged with the wilful murder of James Darnley

III.

LATE on Tuesday evening, Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong, with their daughter, drove into Worcester, to be in readiness for the next day's trial. It was a dull, rainy evening, and Jane leaned back in the carriage, almost careless as to what the following day would bring forth, since Ronald Payne had gone away for ever.

At about five minutes past nine in the morning, the

presiding judge took his seat on the bench. The crowded, noisy court was hushed to silence, the prisoner was brought in, and the trial began.

The chief fact against the accused was, that the pocket-book, with its contents, known to have been in Darnley's possession on the ill-fated morning, had been traced to the prisoner. The bank-notes he had changed away, and a silver pencil-case that was in it he had pledged. All this he did not deny; but he asserted that he had found the pocket-book hid in the hedge, close to the spot, when he had been prowling about there a few hours subsequent to the murder. It *might* be as he said; and the counsel chattered wisely to each other, saying there was no evidence to convict him.

The last witness called was Jane Armstrong; and her sensible, modest, and ladylike appearance prepossessed every one in her favour. She gave her testimony clearly and distinctly. The deadly struggle she had heard; the groans of the victim, and his shrieks of murder; the words uttered by the assailant; the blows which had been dealt, and the fall of the murdered man—all she separately deposed to. Still the crime was not brought home to the prisoner. Jane thought her testimony was over, and was waiting for her dismissal from the witness-box, when the counsel for the prosecution addressed her.

"Look around you, young lady: can you point out any one present as the murderer?"

She looked attentively round the court, but as she had not *seen* the murderer on the dark morning, the effect was vain. But, though she felt it was fruitless, she once more gazed minutely and carefully at the sea of faces around her—at the prisoner's amongst the rest; and turning again to the judge, she shook her head.

At this moment a voice was heard, rising harshly above all the murmur of the court. Jane's back was towards the speaker, and she did not know from whom it came, but the tones thrilled upon her ear with horror, for she recognized them instantaneously. They were addressed to the judge.

"My lord, she's going to swear away my life."

"THAT'S THE MAN!" uttered Jane, with the startling earnestness of truth. "I know him by his voice."

The prisoner—for he had been the speaker—quailed as he heard her, and an ashy paleness overspread his face. The judge gazed sternly, but somewhat mournfully, at him, and spoke words that are remembered in Worcester unto this day.

"Prisoner, *you have hanged yourself.*"

The trial proceeded to its close. A verdict of GUILTY was returned against the prisoner: and the judge, placing on his head the dread black cap,

pronounced upon him the extreme sentence of the law.

Before he suffered, he confessed his guilt, with the full particulars attending it. It may be remembered, that on the stormy evening when the chief actors in this history were introduced to the reader, the unfortunate James Darnley spoke of having just returned from a neighbouring fair. At this fair, it seemed, he had entered a public-house, and finding there some farmers of his acquaintance, he sat down with them to drink a glass of ale. In the course of conversation he spoke of the stock, cattle, etc., he had just sold, and the sum he had received for it, the money being then—he himself gratuitously added—in his breeches-pocket. He mentioned also his intended journey to Worcester market the following day, and that there his business would be to buy.

The wretched man, afterwards his murderer, was present amongst various other strangers, which a fair is apt to collect together, and he formed the diabolical project of robbing him that night; but by some means or other the intention was frustrated. How, was never clearly ascertained, but it was supposed through Darnley's leaving for home at an unusually early hour, that he might be in time to pay a visit to the house of Miss Armstrong. The villain, however, was not to be so baulked. Rightly judging that Darnley

would not remove his money from his breeches-pocket, as he would require it at Worcester market the following day, he made his way to his victim's house in the early dark of the ensuing winter's morning, and knocked him up. A strange proceeding, the reader will say, for one with the intentions he held. Yes. There stood James Darnley shivering at his chamber-window, suddenly roused from a sound sleep, by the knocking; and there, underneath, stood one in the dark, whose form he was unable to distinguish; but it seemed a friendly voice that spoke to him, and it told a plausible tale. That Darnley's cows had broken from their enclosure and were strolling away, trespassing, and that he would do well to rise and hasten to them.

With a few cordial thanks to the unknown warner, with a pithy anathema on his cows, Darnley thrust on his knee-breeches—*the* breeches, as his destroyer had foreseen—and his farm jacket: went downstairs, and departed hastily on his errand. The reader need be told no more.

This was the substance of his confession; and on the appointed day he was placed in the cart to be drawn to execution. At that period, the gallows consecrated to Worcester criminals was erected on Red-hill; a part of the London Road, situated about midway between Worcester and Whittington; and

here he was executed. An exhibition of the sort generally attracts its spectators, but such an immense assemblage has rarely been collected in Worcester, whether before or since, as was gathered together to witness the show on the day of his execution.

In proportion as the tide had turned against Ronald Payne, so did it now set in for him. The neighbourhood, one and all, took shame to themselves for their conduct to an innocent man, and it was astonishing to observe how quick they were in declaring that they must have been fools to suspect a kind-hearted, honourable man could be guilty of murder. Mrs. Armstrong's self-reproaches were keen : she was a just woman : and she knew that she had treated him with bitter harshness. Sir John Seabury however, did not waste words in condolence and reproaches, as did the others : he dispatched a trusty messenger to Liverpool, in the hope of catching Payne before he embarked for a foreign land ; and, as vessels in those times did not start every day, as steamers do in these, he was successful.

IV.

It was a beautiful afternoon in the middle of March. The villagers were decked out as for a holiday; garlands and festoons denoted that there was some unusual cause for rejoicing; and the higher class of farmers and their wives were grouped together, conversing cheerfully. Jane Armstrong stood by her mother, a happy flush upon her pleasing countenance. It was the hour of the expected return of Ronald Payne, and a rustic band of music had gone forth to meet the stage-coach.

Everybody was talking, nobody listening; the buzz of expectation rose louder and louder; and soon the band was heard returning, half of it blowing away at "See the Conquering Hero comes," the other half (not having been able to agree amongst themselves) drumming and whistling "God save the King." Before the audience had time to comment on the novel effect of this new music, horses' heads were seen in the distance, and not the heavy coach, as had been expected, but the open barouche of Sir John Seabury came in sight, containing himself and Ronald Payne.

Ronald was nearly hugged to death. Words of apology and congratulation, of excuse and good-will,

of repentance and joy, were poured into his ear by all, save Jane; and she stood away, the uncontrollable tears coursing down her face. It was plain, in a moment, that he bore no malice to any of them: his brow was as frank as ever, his eye as merry, his hands as open to clasp theirs. He was the same old Ronald Payne of months ago.

"Ronald Payne!" exclaimed Mrs. Armstrong, standing a little before the rest: "I was the first to accuse you; I was the foremost to rail at and shun you; let me be the most eager to express my painful regret, and so far—which is all I can do—make reparation. For the future, you shall not have a more sincere friend than myself."

"And allow me, Mr. Payne, to be the second to speak," added Sir John: "although I have no apology to make, for I never believed you guilty, as you know; but all these good people did, and it is useless, you are aware, to run against a stream. As some recompense for what you have suffered, I hereby offer you a lease of the farm and lands rented by the unfortunate James Darnley. It is the best vacant farm on my estate. And—a word yet: should you not have sufficient ready money to stock it, I will be your banker."

Ronald Payne grasped in silence the offered hand of his landlord. His heart was too full to speak; but a



hum of gratification from those around told that the generosity was appreciated.

"But, Mrs. Armstrong," continued Sir John, a merry smile upon his countenance; "is there no other recompense you can offer him?"

Jane was now standing amongst them, by Ronald's side, though not a word had yet passed between them. His eyes fondly sought hers at the last words, but her glowing countenance was alike turned from him and from Sir John Seabury.

"Ay, by all that's right and just, there is, Sir John!" burst forth good Farmer Armstrong. "He deserves her, and he shall have her; and if my wife still says no, why I don't think she is any wife of mine."

Sir John glanced at Mrs. Armstrong, waiting no doubt for her lips to form themselves into the negative; but they formed themselves into nothing, excepting an approving smile cast towards Ronald Payne.

"And with many thanks, grateful thanks—which I am sure *he* feels—for your generous offer of being his banker, Sir John," continued Mr. Armstrong, "you must give me leave to say that it will not now be needed. My daughter does not go to her husband portionless."

"You must let me have notice of the time, Miss Armstrong," whispered Sir John, as he leaned forward

and took her hand ; " for I have made up my mind to dance at your wedding."

But the secret was not confined to Sir John Seabury. The crowd had comprehended it now ; and suddenly, as with one universal voice, the air was rent with shouts. " Long live Ronald Payne and his fair wife when he shall win her ! Long life and happiness to Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Payne ! "

A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

ON Monday morning, the 11th of May, 1857—the year, as the reader may remember, that England was destined to be shaken to its centre with the disastrous news of the rising in India—there sat in one of the quiet rooms of Enton Parsonage a young and pretty woman, playing with her baby. It was Mrs. Ordie. The incumbent of Enton was Dr. Ling, an honorary canon of the county cathedral. Mrs. Ling was from India: her family connections, uncles, brothers, and cousins, had been, or were, in the civil or military service of Bengal. Consequently, as the daughters of Dr. Ling had grown towards womanhood, they were severally shipped off, with high matrimonial views, according to a fashion that extensively prevails.

Miss Ling, Louisa, had gone out first, and had secured Captain Ordie. Constance went next, and espoused Lieutenant Main, to the indignation of all her relatives, both at home and out, for she was a

handsome girl, and had been set down for nothing less than a major. The third daughter, Sarah Ann, very young and pretty she was, went out the following year, with a stern injunction not to do as Constance had done.

Before Sarah Ann could get there, Mrs. Ordie's health failed, and she was ordered immediately to her native climate. Upon landing, she proceeded to Enton. The voyage had been of much service to her, and her health was improved. And there we see her sitting, on the morning of the 11th of May, nearly twelve months after her arrival, playing with her infant, who was nine months old. In August she and the child were going back to India.

Mrs. Ordie was much attached to this child, very anxious and fidgety over it: her first child had died in India. She fancied, this morning, that it was not well, and had been sending in haste for Mrs. Beecher, who lived close by, just beyond the garden. The honorary canon and the rest of the family had gone to spend a week in the county town.

Mrs. Beecher came in without her bonnet. She had been governess to Louisa and Constance, had married the curate, and remained the deeply-attached friend and adviser of the Ling family. In any emergency Mrs. Beecher was appealed to.

"I am sure baby's ill," was Mrs. Ordie's salutation.



"I have been doing all I can to excite her notice, but she will keep her head down. See how hot her cheeks are."

"I think she is sleepy," said Mrs. Beecher. "And perhaps a very little feverish."

"Do you think her feverish? What shall I do? Good mercy, if she should die as my other baby did!"

"Louisa," remonstrated Mrs. Beecher, "do not excite yourself causelessly. I thought you had left that habit off."

"Oh, but you don't know what it is to lose a child; you never had one," returned Mrs. Ordie, giving way to her excitement. "If she does, I can tell you I shall die with her."

"Hush," interrupted Mrs. Beecher. "I believe there is little, if anything, the matter with the child, excepting her teeth, which renders children somewhat feverish. But if she were dangerously ill, you have no right to say what you have just said."

"Oh yes, I have a right, for it is truth. I would rather lose everything I possess in the world, than my baby. What a long while Mr. Percival is!" she added, walking to the window and looking out.

"You surely have not sent for Mr. Percival?"

"I surely have. And if he does not soon make his appearance, I shall send again."

Mrs. Ordie had always been of most excitable


temperament. As a girl, her imagination was so vivid, so prone to the marvellous, that story books and fairy tales were kept from her. She would get them unknown to her parents, and wake up in the night, shrieking with terror at what she had read. Hers was indeed a peculiarly active brain. It is necessary to mention this, as it may account, in some degree, for what follows.

There was really nothing the matter with the child, but Mrs. Ordie insisted that there was, and made herself miserable all the day. The surgeon, Mr. Percival, came: he saw little the matter with it either, but he ordered it a warm bath, and sent in some medicine—probably distilled water and sugar. Mrs. Beecher came in again in the evening. Mrs. Ordie hinted that she might as well remain for the night, to be on the spot should baby be taken worse.

The curate's wife laughed. "I think I can promise you that there will be no danger, Louisa. You may cease to torment yourself, and go to sleep in peace."

"If anything does happen, I shall send to call you up."

The Lings kept four servants. Two of these, a man and maid, were with their master and mistress; the other two were at home. And there was also the child's nurse. After Mrs. Beecher left, Mrs. Ordie crept along the corridor to the nurse's room, where



the baby slept, and found the nurse undressing herself.

"What are you doing that for?" she indignantly exclaimed. "Of course you will sit up to-night, and watch by baby."

"Sit up for what, ma'am?" returned the nurse.

"I would not leave the child unwatched to-night for anything. My other baby died of convulsions; they may also attack this one. Convulsions are so uncertain: they come on in a moment. I have ordered Martha to sit up in the kitchen and keep hot water in readiness."

"Why, ma'am, there's no cause in the world for it," remonstrated the surprised nurse. "The baby is as well as well can be, and has never woke up since I laid her down at eight o'clock."

"She shall be watched this night," persisted Mrs. Ordie. "So dress yourself again."

"I must say it's a shame," grumbled the nurse, who had grown tired of her mistress's capricious ways, and had privately told the other servants that she did not care how soon she left the situation. "I'd remain up for a week, if there was need of it, but to be deprived of one's natural rest for nothing, ma'am, is too bad. I'll sit myself in the old rocking-chair, if I must stay up," added the servant, half to herself, half to her mistress, "and get a sleep that way."

Mrs. Ordie's eyes flashed anger. The fact was, the slavery of Eastern servants had a little spoiled her for the independence of European ones. She accused the girl of every crime that was unfeeling, short of child murder, and concluded by having the infant's crib carried down to her own room. She would sit up herself and watch it.

The child still slept calmly and quietly, and Mrs. Ordie sat quietly by it. But she began to find it rather dull, and she went to the book-shelves and took down a book. It was then striking eleven. Setting the lamp on a small table at her elbow, she began to read.

She had taken the "Vicar of Wakefield." She had not opened the book for years, and she read on with interest, all her old pleasure in the tale revived. Nearly half-an-hour had elapsed when she suddenly heard footsteps on the gravel-path outside, advancing towards the house, and she looked off and listened. The first thought that struck her was, that one of the servants had been out without permission, and was coming in at that late hour; which, as her watch, hanging opposite, told her, was twenty-five minutes past eleven. But she had not heard the bell ring. It must be explained that Enton Parsonage stood back from the high-road and was surrounded by trees. Two iron gates gave ingress to it from the

road. They were far apart, for the house was low and long; the kitchens, forming a right angle with the house, projected out, their windows looking sideways on the broad half-circular gravel-path that led from one gate to the other. The entrance-porch was near the kitchens. At the back of the house stood the smaller house of the curate; a narrow pathway leading to it from the Parsonage. *That* house faced the side lane, into which lane its small iron gate opened. These gates, the Rector's two large ones and the curate's small one, were always locked at sunset, and the premises were then deemed secure. There was no other entrance to them whatever, and all three gates were lofty and spiked at the top, preventing the possibility of any marauder's climbing over. If any friends came to either of the two houses after the gates were locked, they had to ring for admittance.

Mrs. Ordie heard these footsteps in the stillness of the night, and her eyes instantly glanced at her watch. Twenty-five minutes after eleven. Who was it, at this late hour? But, even as the question passed through her mind, an expression of astonishment rose to her face; her eyes dilated, she drew in her breath and listened intently. If ever she heard the footsteps of her husband, she thought she heard them then.

Yes, yes! It was impossible to mistake his sharp,


firm step, which she had never heard since she left him in Calcutta. It was very close now, nearly underneath her window. With a cry of joy she arose and opened it.

"George, dear George! I knew your step. What has brought you home?"

There was no answer. The footsteps were still advancing, and Mrs. Ordie leaned out. He had come in at the further gate, had passed along the front of the house, and was now underneath her window. She saw him distinctly in the light cast on the path from the kitchen. There was no mistaking him for any other than Captain Ordie, and he wore his regimentals. He lifted his face, she saw it clearly in the light, and looked at her. Then he went on and stepped inside the porch. She called to him again.

"George, you did not hear me. Don't knock, baby's ill. Wait a moment, and I will let you in."

Closing the window, she sprang to the door. Her lamp was not suitable for carrying, and she would not stay to light a taper: she knew every stair well. But she was awkward at the fastenings of the front-door, and found she could not undo them in the dark, so ran into the kitchen. The cook, sitting up in obedience to her orders, was lying back in a chair, her feet stretched out upon another. She was fast asleep and snoring. A large fire burnt in the grate, and two



candles were alight on the ironing-board underneath the window.

"Martha! Martha!" she exclaimed, "rouse yourself. My husband's come."

"What!" cried the woman, starting up in affright, and evidently forgetting where she was. "Who's come, ma'am?"

"Come and open the hall-door. Captain Ordie is there."

She snatched one of the candles from the table, and went on to the door again. The servant followed, rubbing her eyes.

The door was unlocked and thrown open, and Mrs. Ordie drew a little back to give space for him to enter. No one came in. Mrs. Ordie looked out then, holding the candle above her head. She could not see him anywhere.

"Take the light," she said to the maid, and stepped beyond the portico. "George!" she called out, "where are you? The door is open." But Captain Ordie neither appeared nor answered.

"Well, I never knew such an extraordinary thing!"

"Ma'am," said the servant, who began now to be pretty well awake, "I don't understand. Did you say anybody was come?"

"My husband is come. Captain Ordie."

"From Mrs. Beecher's?" asked the woman.

"Mrs. Beecher's, no! What should bring him at Mrs. Beecher's? He must have come direct from Portsmouth."

"But he must have come to the door here from the Beechers'," continued the servant. "He couldn't have come any other way. The gates are locked, ma'am!"

In her wonder at his appearance, this fact had not struck Mrs. Ordie. "One of them must have been left unfastened," she said, after thinking. "That was very careless, Martha. It is your place to see to it, when Richard is out. Papa once turned a servant away for leaving the gates open at night."

"I locked both the gates at sundown," was the woman's reply. "And the key's hanging up in its place in the kitchen."

"Impossible," thought Mrs. Ordie. "Where is Susan?"—alluding to the other servant at home.

"Susan went to bed at ten o'clock, ma'am."

"It is not possible that the gates can have been locked, Martha. The captain came in by the upper one, the furthest from here. I heard him the minute he put his foot on the gravel, and knew his step. You must have thought you locked them. George!" added Mrs. Ordie, in a louder tone. "George!"

There was no answer. No sound whatever broke the stillness of the night.

"Captain Ordie!" she repeated. "Captain Ordie!"

The servant was laughing to herself, taking care that her young mistress did not see her. She believed that Mrs. Ordie had dropped asleep, and had *dreamt* she heard somebody on the gravel.

"I know what it is," cried Mrs. Ordie, briskly. "He has never been here before; and, finding the door was not immediately opened to him, has gone on to Mr. Beecher's, thinking this the wrong house."

She ran down the narrow path as she spoke, which branched off round by the kitchen-window; the maid followed her. It was a light night.

But nothing was to be seen of George Ordie. The curate's house, a small one, presented the appearance of a dwelling whose inmates are at rest; the blinds were drawn before the windows, and all was still. Mrs. Ordie ran over probabilities in her mind, and came to the conclusion that he could not have gone there. The Beechers were early people, and had no doubt been in bed an hour ago. Had her husband knocked there, he would be waiting at the door still, for they had not had time to come down and let him in.

"It could only have been fancy, ma'am," cried Martha.

"Silence," said Mrs. Ordie. "How can it have been fancy? I heard my husband, and saw him."

"Well, ma'am, I argue so from the gates being

fast. He couldn't have got over 'em, because of the spikes."

"The gates cannot be fast," returned Mrs. Ordie, "and it is foolish of you to persist in saying so—only to screen your own carelessness."

"I wish you'd just please to look at the gates," retorted Martha.

"I will," said Mrs. Ordie, anxious to convict Martha to her face. "It is an utter impossibility that Captain Ordie can have come in at a high, locked gate, with spikes on the top; he would not attempt to do so. He would have rung the bell."

"That's what I say," answered Martha. "I dreamt t'other night," she muttered, as she followed her mistress, "that a man came down that there path with lovely gownd pieces to sell: I might just as well have riz up the house, and had *him* looked for."

They gained the broad walk, and proceeded round towards the further gate. It was locked. Martha sniffed.

"Why, it is like magic!" uttered Mrs. Ordie.

"I was certain about its being locked, ma'am. And that's why I say it must be fancy."

Mrs. Ordie was indignant. "Is this gate fancy?" she said, shaking it, in her anger. "Don't tell me again that my husband is fancy. How could I have seen and heard him if he were not come? Captain



Ordie!" she called out, once more. "George! where can you have gone to?"

"Come to the other gate, Martha."

They retraced their steps, Mrs. Ordie looking in all directions for a gleam of scarlet, and reached the other gate. It was locked. Mr. Beecher's gate was locked. Then she went about the garden, and looked and called: but there was no trace of Captain Ordie. The servant walked with her, half amused, half provoked.

"Can he have slipped indoors," murmured Mrs. Ordie, "while we went round to the Beechers?" And she went in to look, taking the opportunity to glance at her child. But Captain Ordie was nowhere to be seen, and she had never been so much perplexed and puzzled in all her life.

"Then he must have gone on, as I thought, to Mr. Beecher's," was her last solution of the enigma. "They were possibly up, and let him in directly. And they are keeping him there till morning, that he may not disturb us, knowing that baby is ill."

"But about the gate," interrupted the servant, returning to her stumbling-block, "how could he have got through it?"

"I know he did get through it, and that's enough," responded Mrs. Ordie, disposing summarily of the difficulty. "Soldiers are venturesome and can do

anything. I will go and fetch him. You stop here, Martha, and listen to baby."

Once more Mrs. Ordie sped to the curate's. She knocked at the door, and stood back to look up at the house. "They have put him into their spare bed," she soliloquized; "Mrs. Beecher has kept it made up this fortnight past, expecting their invalid from India. My goodness! I never thought of it! they have no doubt come together, in the same ship. George may have gone to Calcutta; and, finding James Beecher was coming, must have got leave, all in a hurry, and accompanied him."

Picking up some bits of gravel, she threw them at Mrs. Beecher's bedroom-window. This brought forth the curate in his night-cap, peeping through the curtains.

"It is I, Mr. Beecher. Have you got Captain Ordie here?"

"Make haste, Anne," cried the curate, turning his head round to speak to his wife. "It is Mrs. Ordie. Perhaps the child is in a fit."

"My husband," repeated Mrs. Ordie. "He is here, is he not?"

"Yes; directly," answered the curate, imperfectly understanding, but opening the casement about an inch to speak.

"Is she really worse, Louisa?" exclaimed Mrs.

Beecher, who now appeared at the window. "I will soon be with you."

The curate, believing the matter to be settled, drew in his night-cap. But Mrs. Ordie's voice was again heard. "Mr. Beecher! I want you."

"Dress yourself, my dear," cried Mrs. Beecher to him, in a flurry. "I dare say they want you to go for Mr. Percival. If the baby is really worse, and it is not Louisa's fancy, I shall never more boast of knowing children. She is calling again."

Mr. Beecher reopened the casement. "I am putting on my clothes, Mrs. Ordie. I am coming."

"But you need not do that. Has your brother arrived?"

"Who?"

"Your brother: James Beecher."

"No. Not yet."

"Some ship is in: it has brought my husband. Tell him I am here."

"We'll be down in a minute," called out Mr. Beecher, and making desperate haste. "Anne, Captain Ordie's come."

"Captain Ordie!" exclaimed Mrs. Beecher.

"Mrs. Ordie says so."

"Then we shall have James here to-morrow. How very unexpected Captain Ordie's arrival must have been to his wife? And to find his child ill!"

Louisa Ordie waited. Mrs. Beecher came down first, in a large shawl, her bonnet tied over her night-cap. They began to speak at cross-purposes.

"Is he coming? Have you told him?" impatiently asked Mrs. Ordie.

"My dear, yes. But he had gone upstairs in slippers, and his shoes were in the back-kitchen. Captain Ordie's arrival must have taken you by surprise."

"I never was so much surprised in my life," answered Mrs. Ordie, standing still, and not offering to stir. "I heard his footstep first, and knew it, even in the distance. I am so glad! He must have come with James Beecher."

"Ay, we shall have James here to-morrow. But, my dear, let us not lose time. Is the child very ill?"

"She is not worse; there is no hurry," answered Mrs. Ordie, planting her back against a tree, as deliberately as if she meant to make it her station for the night, and gazing up at the casement which she knew belonged to their spare bedroom. Mrs. Beecher looked at her in surprise.

"Will he be long?" she resumed. "There's no light."

"He will be here directly," said Mrs. Beecher; "he is finding his shoes. I suppose Kitty put them in

some out-of-the-way place, ready for cleaning in the morning."

Another pause, and the curate appeared.

"Oh, Mr. Beecher, *you* need not have got up," was Mrs. Ordie's greeting. "I am sorry to give you all this trouble."

"It is no trouble. Do you want me to go for Mr. Percival?"

"You are very kind, but we shall not require the doctor to-night: at least I hope not. I have been watching her myself: I had her brought down to my own room. Nurse behaved shamefully over it, and I gave her warning."

"Pray let us go on and see how she is," said Mrs. Beecher, never supposing but they had been called up by the state of the child.

"When he comes. You say he will not be long. Had he undressed?"

"Had who undressed?"

"My husband."

Mrs. Beecher stared at her in amazement. "I do not understand you, Louisa. For whom are we waiting here?"

"For my husband, of course. You say he is finding his shoes."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Beecher thought her child's illness was turning her crazy. They looked at her, and at one another.

"My dear, you are mystifying us," spoke the wife, drawing her shawl tighter round her shoulders. "Is your husband coming out; here; into the garden? Are we to wait here for him?"

"Why, you know he is coming out, and of course I shall wait for him. Only think, he wore his regimentals!"

"His regimentals!"

"Yes. Just as if he were on duty."

"Where is Captain Ordie?" interposed the curate.

"Well, that's a sensible question, from you," laughed Mrs. Ordie. "I suppose he is in your spare bedroom, though I see no light. Or else hunting for his shoes in your kitchen."

"Child," said Mrs. Beecher, taking hold of her tenderly, "you are not well. I told you to-day what it would be, if you excited yourself. Let us take you home."

"I will not go without my husband. There. And what makes him so long? I shall call to him. Why, you have locked the door!" she exclaimed. "You have locked him in."

"Locked who in, child?" said Mrs. Beecher. "There's no one in the house but Kitty."

"My husband is there. Did he not come to you?"

"No, certainly not. We have not seen him."

"Mr. Beecher," she impatiently uttered, "I asked

you, at first, whether my husband had come here, and you said yes."

"My dear young lady, I must have misunderstood you. All I heard, with reference to Captain Ordie, was, that he had come: I supposed to your house. He has certainly not been to ours."

"Then what were you talking about?" she reproachfully asked of Mrs. Beecher. "It was shameful to deceive me so! You said he had gone upstairs in slippers, and was finding his shoes. You know you did."

"My dear child, I was speaking of Mr. Beecher. I did not know you thought your husband was here. Why did you think so?"

"If he is not here, where is he?" demanded Mrs. Ordie. "You need not look at me as though you thought I was out of my senses. Do you mean to say you have not seen Captain Ordie?"

"We have not, indeed. We went to bed at ten, and heard nothing, until you threw the gravel at the window."

"Where can he be? What can he have done with himself?"

"Did he leave you to come to us? When did he arrive?"

"It was at twenty-five minutes after eleven. I was sitting by baby, reading the 'Vicar of Wakefield.'"

All at once I heard footsteps approaching from the upper gate, and I knew they were my husband's. I looked out, and saw him, and called to him; he did not seem to hear me, but went in to the portico. I ran down to let him in, and to my surprise he was not there, and I thought he must have come on to you."

"Then you have not yet spoken with him?" exclaimed Mr. Beecher.


"Not yet."

"Are you sure it was Captain Ordie? Who opened the gate to him?"

"No one. The gate is locked. There is the strange part of the business."

"My dear Mrs. Ordie! I fear it must be all a mistake. Captain Ordie would not arrive here on foot, even if he landed unexpectedly; and he could not have got through a locked gate. Perhaps you were asleep."

"Nonsense," peevishly replied Mrs. Ordie; "I was as wide awake as I am now. I had come to that part where the fine ladies from town had gone in to neighbour Flamborough's and caught them all at hunt-the-slipper, Olivia in the middle, bawling for fair play. The ballad 'Edwin and Angelina' came in a few pages before, and that I skipped. I assure you I was perfectly awake."



"I do not think it possible to have been anything but a delusion," persisted Mr. Beecher.

"How a delusion?" angrily asked the young lady; "I do not know what you mean. If my hearing could play me false, my sight could not. I heard my husband, and saw him, and spoke to him. He was in his regimentals: were they a delusion?"

"This is very strange," said Mrs. Beecher. "He would not be likely to travel in regimentals."

"It is more than strange," was Louisa Ordie's answer, as she looked dreamily about. "He is in the grounds, somewhere, and why he does not come forward, I don't know."

The mystery was not cleared up that night. No Captain Ordie made his appearance. The next day Mrs. Ordie sent for her father, to impart to him the strange circumstance. He adopted his curate's view of the affair; and, indeed, the universal view. Mrs. Ordie was much annoyed at their disbelief; and she actually, in spite of her friends, had Captain Ordie advertised for, in the local papers: he *was* in England, she said, and it would be proved so.

When letters next arrived from India, there was one from Captain Ordie, which gave proof positive that he was not, and had not been in Europe. Mrs. Ordie was perplexed.

The weeks went on, and the time fixed for the

departure of Mrs. Ordie and her child drew near. But meanwhile the disastrous news had arrived of the outbreak in India of that dreadful mutiny, and it was deemed advisable to postpone it.

She was sitting one day in a gloomy mood. She had not heard from her husband for some time (his last letter was dated April); and now, as she found, another mail was in, and had brought no news from him. The rising at Delhi, where Captain Ordie was quartered, was known to her, but not, as yet, the details of its more disastrous features. She did not fear his having fallen: had anything happened to him, Mr. Main, or one of her sisters, would have written. They were all at Delhi.

As she thus sat, Mrs. Beecher came in, looking very pale and sad. Dr. and Mrs. Ling had gone off in their pony-carriage to the county town, to pick up news. They were extremely uneasy.

"Another mail has been in these two days!" she exclaimed to Mrs. Beecher. "News travels slower to Enton than anywhere. Have you heard from James Beecher? You don't look well."

"James is come," replied the curate's wife. "He came overland."

"And you have been worrying yourselves that he is dead!" retorted Louisa. "How are things going on, over there?"

"Very badly. They cannot be worse."

"Does he know anything of George?" continued she. "I think he might spare just a minute from his fighting to write to me. What *is* the matter with you? You have not brought bad news for me?" she added, her fears touched, and rising in excitement. "Oh, surely not! Not FOR ME!"

"James's news is altogether very dispiriting," returned Mrs. Beecher, at a loss how to proceed with her task. "My husband is gone to bring Dr. and Mrs. Ling back. We thought you might like them to be at home."

"Has George fallen in battle? Have those half-caste rebels shot him down? Oh——"

"Pray be calm, Louisa!" implored Mrs. Beecher; "if ever you had need of calmness in your life, you have need of it now."

"Is he wounded? Is he dead?" interrupted Mrs. Ordie, with a bitter shriek. "Oh, George! dearest George! and I have been calling you hard names for not writing to me! What is it?"

"There is a great deal to be told, my child. James Beecher was at Delhi in the midst of it."

Louisa suddenly rose and flew from the room. Mrs. Beecher, supposing she had gone to her chamber, went after her; but could not find her there. She had gone out of the house.

A thin man, looking fearfully ill, fair once, but browned by an Eastern sun, was lying on the sofa in the curate's parlour, when a young, excited woman came flying in.

"Mr. James Beecher," she uttered, seizing his hands imploringly, "when did it happen? I am Mrs. Ordie."

"Has my sister-in-law told you—anything?" he hesitated.

"Yes, yes. I know the worst. I want particulars."

He had risen into an upright posture, though he could scarcely support himself, and she sat down beside him. He was a church missionary, a widower with children. "Are you sure that you can bear the details?" he asked, believing, from her words, that she knew the general facts.

"I am sure. Omit nothing. You were at Delhi."

"I went there in the spring, to say farewell to some friends, ere I came home. At Delhi I was taken worse, and lay ill there."

"But about the rising?"

"I am coming to it. On the second Monday in May, after breakfast, bad news came in. The 3rd Light Cavalry had dashed in from Meerut, fully armed, and were slaughtering the Europeans. Eighty-five of this regiment had been tried by court-martial at Meerut, for refusing to handle the greased cartridges,

and sentenced to imprisonment. Their sentences were read out to them on parade on the previous Saturday, the 9th, and they were sent to gaol. On the 10th, Sunday, the regiment rose, released the prisoners, massacred the European officers, their wives and children, and on the 11th came to Delhi, in open revolt. I struggled up, dressed myself, joined the friends I was staying with, and we waited further news. It came in too soon. The mutineers had gone towards Deriowgunge, shooting all the officers they encountered. The brigadier ordered out the 54th Native Infantry and two guns; and, I believe, a detachment of another regiment; but accounts varied. They met the rebels just outside the Cashmere gate, and it was all up, for the Sepoys deserted their officers, and shook hands with the Sowars. Every officer was killed. Treacherous, cowardly wretches! they did not spare one."

She was biting her lips, and striving for calmness, determined to hear all. "Did the officers make no resistance?"

"All that they could make, but they were unarmed," he answered. "The next account that came in was, that the natives had risen and joined the insurrection, were firing the bungalows at Deriowgunge, and ransacking the European residences. The troopers were raging about, destroying life; and when their work

was done, the Goojours,* who had collected in great numbers, as they were sure to do, followed in their wake, and pillaged everything, even to the matting. The bank was rifled."

Mr. Beecher paused, wondering whether he ought to proceed, but her studied calmness deceived him.

"No one knew where to fly for refuge, or what to do: none knew where to put the officers' wives and children. Many were taken to the Flagstaff Tower; but it was thought unsafe and had to be abandoned. Some escaped—many, I hope—in conveyances, or on horseback, or on foot. Some of the officers retreated to the cantonment outside the gates; but the troopers got there when night came, and killed them and their wives and children."

"Were any of *my* family with them?" she asked, still with unnatural composure.

"No. I will tell you. Before mid-day, the ladies of our house, my host's wife and her cousin, escaped to a close hut, or outhouse, and I managed to hobble there with them. I don't know how I did it: but it is astonishing the artificial strength that fear brings out. Others also took refuge there, about half-a-dozen ladies, your two sisters being amongst them, three or

* A race of a peculiar caste, who congregate round Meerut and Delhi. They have been compared to our gipsy tribes, and live by plunder, even in times of peace. Some years ago a regiment was obliged to be raised especially to keep them under.

four children, and a poor little ensign, as ill and weak as I was. We hoped we were in safety; that the rebels would not think of looking for us there; and some old matting, well wetted, was hung up across the entrance, as if to dry. A Sepoy, who was really faithful (and there were many such in the city), sat before it to guard it; many a one, raging after prey, did he turn aside with a well-assumed story that his old mother was in there, dying—let her die in peace.”

“Was my husband there?”

“Not then. No one came near us all that day: they dared not come, for our sakes; and we bore our suspense and apprehension as we best could, not knowing who was living or who dead, of those dearest to us. What a day that was! We had neither food nor drink; the heat of the weather was fearful; and so many of us stowed together, and closely shut up, rendered the air fetid. We thought it could not be less than a hundred and ten degrees. This was not the worst; there were the apprehensions of discovery. We men might brave it, at any rate to appearance, but the poor young women! I believe they would have been glad to die as they cowered there, rather than live to encounter an uncertain fate. I strove to speak comfort to them all, but it was difficult; one or two bore bravely up, and cheered the rest. Late at night, under cover of the darkness, Captain Ordie stole in.”

She raised a faint cry at the name. "My husband!"

"He told us what he could of the progress of the day—it was horribly bad, yet I believe he softened it for their ears—and then he began to talk of our own situation. It would be impossible, he said, to keep in the same place of concealment another day, and that we had better join a party who were about to make their escape towards Kurnaul. All seized at the idea eagerly, and wished to start without the delay of an instant. Mrs. Holt, my friend's wife, inquired after her husband, whom she had not seen since morning.

"'He is safe, and unharmed,' replied Captain Ordie. 'You will see him when we are fairly off; but it was not thought well for more than one of us to venture here.'

"'And my husband?' added Mrs. Main, who had done nothing but clasp her baby to her breast all day, and weep silently. 'Is he safe?' Captain Ordie answered evasively," continued Mr. Beecher, "and I knew, by his words and by the turn of his face, that poor Main was gone."

"Go on," groaned Mrs. Ordie. "George's turn comes next."

Mr. Beecher hesitated. "I will finish later," he suggested.

"No, finish now. You cannot leave me in this suspense. It would be cruel."

"Captain Ordie spoke of the plan of departure. The officers had but three horses amongst them, and the ladies and invalids were to take it in turn to ride; two, with a child, on each horse. All the party were to keep together. At that moment arose a horrible yell, which we knew proceeded from a Sowar, and one of them appeared at the entrance, tearing down the matting. All the light we had was a night-wick in some oil, but we saw his dark face. The children shrieked; the ladies also, and huddled themselves together in a corner; and Captain Ordie advanced to the entrance, and dealt the man a blow on the temple with the butt-end of his pistol."

"I hope it killed him!" she uttered, her eyes sparkling.

"I think it did, for he lay motionless. Captain Ordie kicked him out of the way, and, throwing himself on his hands and knees, crawled out cautiously to reconnoitre. Alas! we soon heard a struggle outside; two more were upon him."

"And he was struck down! I *know* you are going to tell me so," she uttered, in a low, passionate wailing.

Mr. Beecher sat silent, his countenance full of distress.

"Louisa, my darling, be composed," interrupted Mrs. Beecher, who had come in search of her. "You know the worst now."

"Yes, I know the worst," she moaned. "They killed him, there and then."

"They did," whispered Mr. Beecher. "It was instantaneous."

She turned sick, and shook violently. But, by strong control, spoke again. "Finish the history. What became of you, inside?"

"It was all commotion in a moment, dreadful commotion. The poor terrified women attempted to fly; some succeeded, and I hope escaped. Providentially there were only these two troopers; had more been upon us, none would have been left. The first thing I saw distinctly was, that one of them had caught Mrs. Main's infant, and was tossing it on the point of his bayonet. He next seized her."

"Constance?" panted Mrs. Ordie.

"Yes. And killed her. Killed her instantly. Be thankful."

Mrs. Ordie pressed down her eyelids, as if she would shut out some unwelcome sight. "Constance murdered," she moaned. "And you tell me to be thankful!"

"Be ever thankful," impressively spoke the missionary. "Others met with a worse fate."

"Sarah Ann?" she shivered. "What became of her?"

"I am unable to tell you. I trust she escaped. At

the moment of Mrs. Main's death, I fainted on the floor where I was lying, and that must have saved my life. When I recovered, not a creature—living—was to be seen. The children were lying about; they had been put out of their misery; two of the ladies, and the ensign. Poor young fellow! he had told us, in the day, that he had no parents or near friends to mourn him, so the loss of a little griff, if they did kill him, would not count for much."

"Dead? All?"

"All. The two ladies were Mrs. Holt and Mrs. Main. Of the other ladies I saw no trace. I trust," he added, clasping his hands fervently, "that they escaped. We shall hear of many miraculous escapes: I pray that theirs may be of the number."

"Now, Louisa, let me take you home," urged Mrs. Beecher. "You do know the worst."

"I must hear all," was the answer, uttered in a tone of frenzy. "If I thought there was a word, a recital, left untold to me, I must get up in the middle of the night, and come and ask for it."

"You have heard all," said Mr. Beecher—"all that I know. My own escape I will not trouble you with. It was wonderful: and I lost no time in coming home overland."

She leaned back on the sofa and closed her eyes. Mrs. Beecher was thinking of her random words—that

she would rather lose everything in the world than her child. But her thoughts had not grasped the dreadful possibility of losing her husband.

"When did this happen?" Mrs. Ordie suddenly asked. "What date?"

"I mentioned it," said Mr. Beecher. "Late on the night of the 11th of May."

She leaned forward breathless, her eyes staring. "How late? The exact hour? Speak?"

"It must have been near half-past eleven. When Captain Ordie came in, we asked him the time (for, strange to say, in our hurried flight, not one of us put a watch about us), and his watch said a quarter-past eleven; and we were talking, after that, perhaps ten minutes. It must have been about twenty-five minutes after eleven when he was killed."

"Listen to that!" shrieked Louisa Ordie, seizing Mrs. Beecher by the arm. "It was the very hour I saw and heard him. How was he dressed?" she rapidly asked.

"In full regimentals."

"There! There! Do you believe me now, Mrs. Beecher? Ah! you all ridiculed me then; but you hear it! It was my husband that came down the path here—appearing to me in the moment of his death."

The reader must judge of this mystery as he pleases.

It happened; at least, to the positive belief of the lady, here called Mrs. Ordie; as her friends can testify. They reason with her in vain. They point out that twenty-five minutes after eleven in Delhi would not be twenty-five minutes after eleven here: they believe that it was, and could have been, nothing but her own vivid imagination, that her thoughts were probably running on her husband through the "George" in the "Vicar of Wakefield." But Louisa Ordie nevertheless believes, and will believe to the end of time, that it was her husband in the spirit who showed himself to her that unhappy night.

2

RUPERT HALL.

THE long dark train swept down the avenue, through the line of trees. There was no hearse, no mourning-coach; it would have been superfluous to employ them, for the church stood within sight of the avenue-gates. The clergymen, the doctors, the bearers with their heavy burden, the mourners and the followers, all were on foot, and the dreary autumn wind, whistling through the trees, scattered the falling leaves over them in showers. *That burden!* I stood at one of the upper windows, convulsed with grief, for it was all that remained of my revered and darling mother. I was young to be left in the world without her; my fifteenth birthday had but just come round.

They were soon back; so soon—as it seemed to me. The visitors remained downstairs, but my father came in search of me. He sat down on the sofa, and drew me to him: his eyes were red and swollen and his face was pale. “Jane,” he whispered, drawing me to

his breast, "henceforth we must be all in all to each other."

We were in my mother's dressing-room, where I had wandered to watch that departing train. As my head rested where he had placed it, my eyes fell on a pair of fur slippers, which she had used to slip on when her feet were cold, and which must have been overlooked when Charlotte put away her things after all was over. These familiar objects of everyday life brought our loss more forcibly home to me, and I cried aloud in my desolation :

"Oh, papa ! if I could but have died with her !"

"Hush, hush, my child. For you, time will arise with healing on its wings."

How long we sat there, and how hopelessly we wept, I cannot tell. That day appears, even now, so full of misery, that I care not to recall it. Ay, and for many, many days after that, I know that we both shed bitter tears ; apart, if not together.

"We must have some one to supply—in a measure—her place to you," my father said to me, when a few weeks had gone by. "I cannot part with you for school——"

"School !" I interrupted. "Oh, papa ! Why cannot the masters continue to come to me as usual ?"

"I do not speak particularly of your studies, Jane, but you must have a companion here, one to

train and guide you. If I could but find a judicious governess——”

“Oh, papa,” I again pleaded, in excitement, “not a governess! Anything but that.”

“Be calm, Jane, and reasonable. I tell you it would be more of a companion than a governess. It is not well for you to live on here alone. The neighbours, I hear, are already saying that I am careless of your interests. Your mother would counsel the step: let that reconcile you to it.”

And I said no more.

Living at the other end of Teversham, more than a mile away, for our village was long and straggling, were some relatives of my dear mamma's. Old Mrs. Rupert, and two daughters. I never liked them: even as a child, I could see they were selfish and most insincere. They were of good family, always boasting of their connection with the Ruperts at the Hall. There was quite a colony of Ruperts in and about Teversham: all very proud, and very poor—saving the family at the Hall: they were rich enough. When Jane Wall, daughter of old Colonel Wall, married my father, Robert Dixon, they said she had lowered herself because she was slightly connected with the Ruperts at the Hall; while he, and his father before him, had made their money in business as solicitors.

We went to call upon old Mrs. Rupert, and told her

it was decided that I should have a governess. She spoke much against it; and her daughters, Betsy and Louisa, abused governesses to my heart's content. They assured my father there was not a governess in the three kingdoms but would snap him up and marry him, if she had the chance; and it was decided, on the spur of that unlucky moment, that Louisa Rupert should take up her residence with us, and be to me in the light of a mother. I did not like the proposal in the abstract, but it was more palatable than that of the governess, and I urged it. Not that she needed urging.

She came to our house the next week, with all her luggage. Louisa Rupert must have been then about eight-and-thirty, a little younger than my dear mamma. She began by being indulgent and deferent to me; always talking of me, always praising me up to papa more than I liked—more than I thought was genuine. She deferred to my father's tastes, she humoured his prejudices, she humoured mine, and she was ever lively and pleasant, and made things comfortable. We had used to think Louisa Rupert ill-tempered, but she now appeared to be quite an example of sweetness.

They, these Miss Ruperts, had warned my father against governesses: they had more cause to warn him against themselves. I feel ashamed to write it,

but I cannot record anything but the truth. Ere fifteen months had elapsed since our heavy day of mourning and sorrow, Louisa Rupert had become my father's wife—the second Mrs. Dixon.

Nothing was said to me of the projected match. The first person to whisper the rumour to me was Charlotte, one of our long-attached servants. I had thought it odd when, in January, Miss Rupert left our house to pass a month, as she said, at a distant watering-place. She had a married sister living there, a Mrs. Arrowsmith, but still I wondered that she did not choose a more genial season. Three weeks afterwards papa also left, and then Charlotte told me what people said—that they were gone to be married.

How angry I was!—with Charlotte. Had she told me I was gone to be married, I could not have been more indignantly disbelieving.

“Charlotte, how *dare* you assert so disgraceful a calumny?”

“Dear Miss Jane,” she answered, “you are the only person who has not foreseen it for some months past. I fear you will find it true.”

Alas! I did. In two or three days a letter came from my father, setting all doubt at rest. He had just married Louisa Rupert. He said he hoped the step would conduce to the happiness of us all, and that he had entered upon it as much for my sake as for his own.

Happiness! For my sake! I am not naturally passionate, but a storm of passion, of agony, shook me then. It was not because Louisa Rupert was exalted to authority over me; I thought not of that; but that he should so soon have forgotten my angel mother—should have lowered himself to take another wife in haste so unseemly. At least, it seemed so to me. I think it must seem so to all daughters who have to experience the like. I cannot describe the wretched feeling that oppressed my heart, and it is not fit I should. It seemed as if the shame of the act was reflected upon me.

I had thrown myself on the sofa, sobbing with all my might and main, when some one, who must have come in unheard, touched me on the sleeve and spoke, half laughingly: "Jane, how foolish you are!"

It was Lionel Rupert. A fine-grown, handsome youth of twenty, sunny-tempered as the day, and merry-hearted, a rare favourite in Teversham. He was first cousin to Betsy and Louisa, and, since the latter's residence with us, had been frequently at our house. My father liked him.

I sat up and strove for calmness, rather annoyed that Lionel should have seen me giving way so, for he had a propensity for ridicule and joking. However, he did not ridicule me then.

"If I were you, Jane, I should show myself more of a man than to sob like that."

"You don't know the cause; you don't know the—the shameful"—I hesitated in my choice of a word, and then brought out a bad one—"news I have received this morning."

"I have heard it," he replied. "But all your sobbing and distress will not mend it."

"Where did you hear it, Lionel?"

"Oh, all Teversham has heard it. And Charlotte rushed to the door, full of it, when she saw me coming."

"Oh, Lionel!" I cried out, in my grief, as I had once before cried out to my father, "if I had but died with mamma!"

"If you would but abstain from talking nonsense!" retorted Lionel. "You are too old for it."

"Of course you cannot enter into my feelings, or take my part," was my resentful answer. "As your cousin, you naturally regard this marriage with a favourable eye. She *is* your cousin, you know. Had she chosen to marry papa in mamma's lifetime, perhaps you would have seen no harm in it."

Lionel laughed, and bent on me his clear bright eyes, in which I read a sympathy he would not suffer his lips to utter.

"Jane, I'll bring an action against you for calum-

niating me. You know my sweet cousin Louisa was always my *bête noire*. Betsy's an old dragon, but she is better than Louisa. For my part, I would have espoused the ancient apple-woman at the corner rather than Miss Louisa Rupert."

And so, Lionel talked and soothed me into reason. Somehow he could always comfort me.

At the end of a week they came home. I had schooled myself into calmness. I could not receive my father as I used to; *I could not*; for the feeling of reverence, the respect and veneration due to a parent from a child, had left my heart for ever. He must have noticed the difference, but he said nothing and went out for a stroll in the village. I was cool to Mrs. Dixon, too cool, but I was not insolent; a true friend in Teversham had given me judicious Christian counsel, and I was really striving to profit by it. But when Mrs. Dixon went upstairs to take possession for the first time of the bedroom and dressing-room which had been my dearest mother's, I ran up to my own chamber and sobbed aloud in my great sorrow.

Papa brought Lionel Rupert back to dinner. I think now, though it did not strike me then, that he feared the family party, that first evening, might be awkward, and deemed it not amiss to ask a stranger to it. Lionel laughed and talked as usual, and began

telling them what had transpired in the village during their absence.

In the midst of it, Phillis threw open the drawing-room door, and spoke. "Dinner is on the table—sir." She hesitated between the two last words, as I have marked it. In my mother's time, she used to make the announcement to her; since, she had always made it to me; and now she preferred to make it to her master, rather than to her new mistress. I thanked the girl in my heart; but I don't know what that new mistress thought.

Charlotte stood in the dining-room as we went in. I advanced to the place at the head of the table. After mamma's death, no one had occupied it till Miss Rupert came, and then my father had desired me to take it, which I did, and had taken it ever since. I had no intention of being rude to Mrs. Dixon in taking it now: I declare it had never once crossed my mind that that seat must be mine no longer. I was thinking but of Charlotte—that she need not have troubled herself to come in for only Lionel Rupert: for it was not customary for her to help to wait, except when there was company. Though perhaps the servants thought this a special day. I bent my head down towards the cloth, expecting my father to say grace; but there seemed a delay, and I looked up. Standing by my side, waiting for me to vacate the seat, was Mrs.

Dixon, and in the same moment Charlotte came up and whispered :

“ Miss Jane, Phillis has put your seat here to-day.”

I darted from the place as if a hornet had stung me, and went to the side seat, where Louisa Rupert used to sit. Had I committed a crime, I could not have felt more wretchedly confused and guilty : my throat felt choking, my cheeks were burning, and I glanced across the table at Lionel, to gather what he could think of me. I gathered nothing, for his face was turned up towards the lights of the chandelier, and he began telling of a new-fashioned one, just introduced at the Hall, which had come sliding down on to the floor, in the midst of an evening party, narrowly escaping the wig and head of old Sir Actæon.

Dinner passed off pretty well ; thanks, I believe, to Lionel ; and the maids quitted the room. Papa cracked some filberts and handed them to me.

“ Thank you,” I said. “ I will pass these to Mrs. Dixon.”

“ Keep them yourself, Jane ; I will crack more for *your mamma*,” was the reply, with an unmistakable emphasis.

“ I prefer not to take any, papa,” I answered. “ Mrs. Dixon can have these.” And my emphasis on “ Mrs. Dixon ” was quite as forcible as his own.

“ No quarrelling about filberts,” interposed Lionel,

in his straightforward, off-hand way; "they need not go begging. If Jane won't eat them, there are plenty of us who will. Try this fine pear, Jane. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Dixon, I did not perceive that the salt stopped with me."

Ah, well! Lionel might rattle on and make peace if he liked, but my heart felt as if it were breaking.

There was no change at home for several months, no perceptible change, for Mrs. Dixon knew well how to play her cards, and she let it come on gradually. Miss Dixon's wishes were still consulted, Miss Dixon's pleasure was still deferred to: if the servants demanded instructions, they would occasionally be told to "ask Miss Dixon." She was weaving her meshes round my father to mould him to her entire will; she was working to make herself first in all things, and his daughter second, and to have striven for that too palpably in the early days of her authority, would have been a dangerous game.

Do not let the reader mistake me. Of course I did not expect to be first now: I could not and did not wish it; but I felt sure she was only acting a part, and I knew not where it would land me.

Before the change came—for it did come—Lionel Rupert was gone. The only child of a proud and needy man, it was intended that he should be proud and needy too. The Ruperts had never soiled their

hands with a profession, not they. Sir Actæon Rupert, the reigning baronet, lived in profusion at the Hall, and the other branches of the family lived in genteel pinching elsewhere, never forgetting that they were RUPERTS. How the funds had been found to bestow upon Lionel the noble education he had received, nobody could imagine; unless Sir Actæon, who had a liking for his young kinsman, had supplied them. But of what service was Lionel's education likely to be to him? His father would not let him use it. He was too poor to buy him a commission, and little else would have suited the pride of the Ruperts. So Lionel remained perforce at home, shooting, fishing, idling, and plunging into young men's mischief. But at length his father died, and there came liberty for Lionel. He decided forthwith to betake himself to London.

It was in July when he came to bid us farewell, six months after my father's marriage. The pony-carriage was at the door when he came in: papa was going to drive out with Mrs. Dixon. The latter came down with her things on.

"I cannot make out what it is that is taking you to London, Lionel," she said. "You surely cannot contemplate any step that would dishonour the family?"

"Not I," cried Lionel. "I'll take care of the honour of the family."

"Not put yourself into any—any office—any profession: in short, not attempt any means of earning money to eke out your income," went on Mrs. Dixon. "It would be a disgrace upon the Ruperts for ever."

"One they would never get over," gravely answered Lionel.

Lionel took leave; papa and Mrs. Dixon drove out; and I leaned my aching head on the arm of the sofa, for some feeling, akin to despair, had laid hold of me. But Lionel suddenly came back; I heard his step outside. In a moment he was in the room and had closed the door. I started up, and blushed like a guilty thing.

"Jane, I have a word to say to you, and I may as well say it now, for it is hard to tell when we shall meet again. I shall not come back here until I have built up my fortunes. I don't know how it is to be done, yet. I have the will, and I must make the way."

"Lionel!" I exclaimed, in surprise. "Build up your fortunes! What have you just been saying to Mrs. Dixon?"

Lionel burst into a laugh. It seemed to intimate that what he said to Mrs. Dixon need not always be taken for gospel. Before he spoke, his voice and manner had changed to seriousness.

"I told her I would not disgrace the Ruperts: I

hope I never shall. But their notions of disgrace differ from mine, Jane. They attach ignominy to work; I, on the contrary, think it lies with idleness. I feel, as an accountable being, that my time and talents were not given me to be wasted, and I purpose to employ them in the best way that fate or fortune may offer."

"Whatever will they say, Lionel? Sir Actæon will have another fit."

"What will Sir Actæon care for me? I shall be far enough away. They may never hear of me, and I dare say will never ask after me. But I told you I had a word to say. It has struck me, Jane, that when my fortunes *are* built up, I shall want somebody to share them with me. I would rather have Jane Dixon than any one else in the world."

I was so confused as scarcely to understand him. But my heart beat against my side with a sensation of rapture which had never yet had place there.

"And as I may be building up this castle in the air while I build up my fortunes," went on Lionel, "I thought it well to assure myself, beforehand, that it was one not entirely without foundation. What say you, Jane?"

I said nothing. Lionel drew my face to his.

"God bless you, Jane!" he whispered. "Remember, it may be years."

Years indeed went on, and there were changes in our home. Old Mrs. Rupert was dead, and Miss Betsy had come to live with us. I suppose she paid something, but these details were not spoken of to me. It seemed that the chief business of her life was to make mischief about me. I had not a will of my own: she contradicted and thwarted me in the most trifling things. Mrs. Dixon had long treated me with indifference, almost contempt. She exercised supreme authority, and I was regarded in the house as a mere cipher, utterly put down. She had completely gained the ear of my father: to appeal to him in the domestic bickerings which often arose, was worse than useless, so far as I was concerned, for he always took the part of his wife. She had contrived to imbue him with a spirit of resentment, of dissatisfaction, towards me; so that, happen what would, *I* was in the wrong. The servants were fresh, excepting Charlotte; Mrs. Dixon was their absolute mistress; I was scarcely regarded as my father's daughter. And there were young children in our house now, who certainly did not contribute to its peace and comfort. For these three children, only one additional servant was engaged; so that our former orderly mode of living was broken into. Whether my father's income, a fixed one, would not really allow greater expenditure, or whether Mrs. Dixon went upon the saving plan from choice, I could

not tell. I know that I was much stunted, and could not dress as I used to do. The servants grumbled, and said they had too much work, Charlotte especially, upon which Mrs. Dixon said that she might leave; but Charlotte chose to remain on.

Oh! mine was an unhappy life! Domestic disorder and discomfort, where formerly all was so regular and peaceful; humiliating slights cast daily upon me; innocent visits of social intercourse refused to me! The children allowed me no time for visiting, Mrs. Dixon said, and *I* was expected to attend to them quite as much as any servant. Excepting Charlotte, there were none around to care for me, or speak to me a pleasant word, and my spirit was almost broken. In my twenty-second year, I felt like a worn-out woman, caring little for life.

But where was Lionel? Ah! for all these years he had never noticed me by letter or message; had never given token that those loving words of promise spoken on his departure were really meant in earnest, or ever to be realized. I had long ago ceased to regard them as real, and striven to school my poor, credulous, disappointed heart to the evident truth. Lionel was no longer in London. Soon after his arrival there, news came that he had got into something, "some office," and the Ruperts, from Sir Actæon down to Mrs. Dixon, looked very blue and dumb, and finally discarded him

from their memories. To speak of Lionel Rupert after this, would have been high treason. Three years subsequently, on the breaking out of the war with Russia, we heard that he had gone to the East, in the Commissariat department.

And the war went on, and old Sir Actæon died, and his son Sir Otway came into power at the Hall. The second and only remaining son, Charles, was with his regiment in the Crimea.

We were sitting one day in the dining-room, which was now little better than a nursery. I had the youngest child, an infant, on my lap—I generally had one or other of them—and papa was reading at a distant table, when Mr. Wall, a distant relation of my mother's, entered. "Don't disturb yourselves," he said; "I have only stepped in for a moment to tell you the sad news. I suppose you cannot have heard it yet. I never met with anything so mournful in the whole course of my life. You must prepare yourselves for a shock, ladies, for I have two deaths to tell you of."

Miss Betsy reached out for her smelling-salts, but the rest of us sat quietly still.

"Sir Otway got into a row this morning. He was out early, crossing his grounds, and found some men stealing off with game. He accosted them, and they said they had bought it; but he said it was his—as it

no doubt was. An altercation ensued. They were insolent, and Sir Otway was fiery. Young blood will be young blood, and Sir Otway has inherited his father's hasty temper. They came to blows, or close upon it, and when Sir Otway reached the Hall he was in a fearful state of excitement. There lay a despatch just arrived from the East—black seal, mourning edges, official look, and all the rest of it. Poor Sir Otway opened it, and, in the act of reading its contents, fell dead."

Mrs. Dixon screamed.

"How very shocking!" exclaimed my father. "Is he really dead?"

"He is really and truly dead," replied Mr. Wall. "Died as he was falling. Not an hour ago."

"Tell the servants to close the shutters," sobbed Miss Betsy, hysterically. "Our poor cousin!"

"But what was the cause? what did he die of?" interrupted my father.

"Disease of the heart, there's no doubt. Of course it will be ascertained at the *post-mortem*. His heart was thought not to be sound, you know, and the morning's excitement must have hastened on the crisis. But——"

"The last time I ever saw Otway Rupert I told him he was looking ill," broke in Miss Betsy.

"Well—yes—perhaps he was," assented Mr. Wall,

in a snappish tone, as if not pleased at being interrupted. "But you have not heard all. The letter brought news of his brother Charles's death. He was killed from the bursting of a shell, in the trenches before Sebastopol."

We sat speechless with horror; almost questioning the truth of Mr. Wall's words. The unexpected death of two brothers, both so fearfully sudden, was a calamity surely unparalleled.

"Whether it was the excitement of the quarrel alone, or that, combined with the shock of the news, that killed Sir Otway, will never be decided," proceeded Mr. Wall. "But the poor young men are both dead. Sir Otway was passionately attached to his brother. Hark!"

They were ringing out the passing-bell. We listened, holding our breath. Yes; *for two*. I shivered in my seat.

"What are you about, Jane?" demanded Mrs. Dixon. "You will have the baby's frock in the fire. Be careful, if you please. Mr. Wall, who says Sir Otway had disease of the heart? I never heard it."

"Because they kept it quiet. But he *had*. I met the surgeon just now, and he began to talk of it. Lady Rupert, in her lifetime, could not bear it to be hinted at. Sir Otway knew of it himself."

"I knew of it, too," interposed Miss Betsy. "Louisa, do have the shutters closed."

"Ring and order it to be done," said my father. "Who is the next heir?" he added, closing his book, and coming forward. "Let me see; I declare I don't remember who the next heir is, Wall."

"Why, Master Lionel, of course."

"Lionel!" I uttered, half springing from my seat. "Impossible!"

"Indeed, he is, Jane," was Mr. Wall's answer. "Little as he, or any one else, could have anticipated it, Lionel Rupert is now the inheritor. I'll be bound the thought never crossed that young fellow's mind, that he might one day step into the baronetcy."

"Pay attention to the baby, Jane," angrily repeated Mrs. Dixon again. "Mind your own business. What is it to you who has succeeded? They are not your relations. What are you shaking for?"

What indeed? What was Lionel to me? If the faintest possible hope had ever lingered in my soul, this event destroyed it. Sir Lionel Rupert was not likely to remember poor Jane Dixon.

Another twelvemonth passed away. Sir Lionel lingered in the Crimea, and the Hall was shut up. It was understood that he had given up his post in the Commissariat, but stopped out there "to see the

fun." Just before the end of the twelvemonth, however, news again came from him: he had arrived in London, and was coming home.

Christmas-Eve was the day fixed for his arrival, and all the Ruperts were in an exalted state of mind; each one secretly hoping to be especially singled out by the young baronet more than the rest. Otway and Charles Rupert, haughty lads, had held themselves at a due distance from their poorer relatives; but Lionel had been of the poor ones, entirely one of themselves, hail-fellow-well-met with all. Mrs. Dixon and Betsy Rupert took all the arrangements into their own hands, and managed to ingratiate themselves wonderfully with the steward, to whom Sir Lionel had entrusted the control of his affairs. It was decided by them that he should be welcomed home by a grand entertainment: a ball given at his own house the night of his arrival. My father suggested, in his quiet way, that an entertainment might be out of place, considering the melancholy circumstances which had led to Lionel's succession. But he was not listened to. That was a year ago, they said. And so it was. Poor Otway and his brother Charles were forgotten: the dead soon are; and invitations in Sir Lionel Rupert's name, he knowing nothing whatever about it, went out to all the county.

Mrs. Dixon, leaving her children for once to the

care of servants, and ordering me to see to them as well, was at the Hall, morning, noon, and night, superintending and giving orders. I believe the steward began to think—and others, too—that she took a great deal upon herself; but she *was* the first cousin of Sir Lionel. She and Miss Betsy sent a hasty despatch for their sister's second daughter, Kate Arrowsmith, a girl about my own age, and she arrived at our house. They might, in courtesy, have invited the eldest, Maria: but she was plain and awkward, I heard them whisper to one another, whereas Kate was beautiful. I wondered what looks could have to do with it, but I had not to wonder long.

Mrs. Dixon and Miss Betsy had been concocting a scheme; a little plan; and it oozed out. Charlotte got hold of it in some way, and she spoke of it to me. They intended that Kate Arrowsmith and her charms should subdue the heart and win the hand of Sir Lionel Rupert, and were thus planning for it. She was to be introduced to him, and take his heart by storm, at the projected entertainment. Charlotte also got hold of something else—that I was not to be invited to make one at the Hall on the ball night. I believe the girl must have listened to conversation not meant for her, but I did not accuse her of it. I felt that what she said was true; for it wanted now but a few days to the ball, and nothing whatever had been

said to me directly about it. The omission had not struck me before.

How angry I was! how pained and hurt! Every indignant feeling was aroused, and I determined to go if possible. It was not that I cared to see Sir Lionel; at least, I thought I did not; for every vestige of former hope had long died within me, and our meeting would be painful rather than otherwise: but they had no right to put upon me in this way, and trample me, as Charlotte called it, in the dust.

The morning after Charlotte's communication they set out as usual to the Hall—I mean Mrs. Dixon and her sister—Kate Arrowsmith being squeezed in between them in the pony-chaise. I immediately went in search of my father, and found him on the sofa by the dressing-room fire, playing with his little four-year-old boy. Charlotte was in the adjoining bedroom, dusting, but I did not care for that. I stood before him, my colour flushing.

“Papa! I have gathered a hint that I am not to go to the entertainment at the Hall.”

“Indeed I don't know, Jane. Why are you not?”

“I have come to ask you why. Mrs. Dixon says I am not.”

“Well, if she says it, I suppose you cannot go.”

“Sir,” I said, my heart rising, “do you remember that day, years ago, when you and I sat together on

that very sofa, weeping; when you had come in from laying my poor mother in the ground? You said, then, that we would be all in all to each other. How has that promise been carried out?"

"Why, what's the matter with you, Jane?" he exclaimed, looking startled.

"I could have borne much from you, papa: I have borne much: but to be ill-used, despised, treated as of no account, taunted by her whom you have put over me in mamma's place——"

I was choking with sobs, and could not continue.

"Jane! Jane! whatever is it? Speak out."

"I will not speak of the past—now—but of this fresh indignity sought to be put upon me. It is an indignity, sir, and you ought to see it as such, when offered to your daughter. Every one goes to this entertainment but myself. Look around, papa, and see if there is one young lady being left out. Mrs. Dixon and her sister have actually brought their niece here, miles across the country, to be present at it; but I, your daughter, am to be excluded."

"Jane, I think you ought to go," he replied, after a minute's uncomfortable thought. "I see no reason against it. You shall go. I suppose the children can be left by us all for one evening."

"And if they couldn't, sir," interposed Charlotte, who came from the bedroom at the moment, "it would

not be Miss Jane's place to stop with them. What are us servants good for, if we can't take care of three little children?"

She passed through the room as she spoke, and my father turned to me.

"Dry your tears, Jane. I tell you, you shall go."

"It is not *to go* that I am weeping," I almost indignantly cried. "You said—that day—when I wished I had died with mamma, that time would come to me with healing on its wings. Papa, there is no healing in my chequered life; I still wish I had died with her. It had been happier for me."

"Pray, Jane, do not talk in this uncomfortable strain. If things are so very miserable for you, they must be altered. I will see to it. Do you want anything else now?"

"I have no dress to go in to the Hall. How shall I get one?"

"Dress! You must ask Mrs. Dixon about that."

"No, sir. To ask her would not give me one. I should be put off with orders to wear an old one, be it ever so unfit. This very day they are taking Kate to try on the one being made for her. Many a child is treated with more respect and consideration than I am, papa. I will not ask Mrs. Dixon."

"Dear me, Jane!" he somewhat peevishly uttered,

"I don't understand these things. Dress! Well—order yourself one. Will that do?"

"Thank you, sir."

"And let the bill come in to me. Quietly, you know."

"Yes, thank you, papa."

Charlotte was lingering on the stairs when I went down.

"Miss Jane, are you to go?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, that's all right. I was determined them children shouldn't stand in your light, if I could put in a word against it. If Mrs. Dixon and the other one were not everlastingly drumming round master with their ill-natured counsels, things would soon come straight between you and him. If you will take my advice, Miss Jane, you will not let them know that you are going; they would ferret out some way to put you off."

I did take Charlotte's advice, and said nothing. They never dreamt I was going. In their preparations for this ball, their consultations as to dress and other details, there was no reference made to me, though carried on in my presence. Once there arose a great discussion—whether Kate should wear in her hair blue flowers, the colour of her dress, or gold wheat-ears.

"I wonder which Lionel would admire most?" exclaimed Miss Betsy, unconsciously betraying the bent of their thoughts.

"I dare say Lionel would not notice the one or the other," I interposed. "Men never do. They see no difference——"

Mrs. Dixon turned to me her haughty face, reproof on its every feature. "*Sir* Lionel, if you please, Miss Dixon, when you speak of my cousin." And a retort was on my lips: but I kept it in.

Monday, Christmas-Eve, came round in due course. As its evening drew on we heard that Sir Lionel had arrived. Our house was in a bustle; all the ladies beginning to dress long before there was any need of it. Charlotte snatched a moment from her attendance in Mrs. Dixon's room, where Kate was dressed, to assist me. I had chosen white crape, for we were in mourning for a relation of my father's. There was nothing fine about it or about me; but when it was on, and Charlotte turned me round and round, she declared I should look the most lady-like girl in the room. As to the few ornaments I wore, they were only jet. My own dear mamma's pearls, which ought to have been mine, were on somebody else that night, setting off her heavy black satin.

I did not go down till the last moment. They were all assembled round the dining-room fire, waiting for

the carriage. Kate's face looked lovely, but not her dress; there was too much of it: satin, lace, gauze, ribbons, all in too great profusion. Miss Betsy wore a crimson velvet, which had been in the family twenty years. They stared at me in astonishment.

"What means this?" broke forth Mrs. Dixon.
"What are *you* dressed for?"

"Jane appealed to me, and I said she was to go," hastily observed my father, with more decision in his tone than he commonly used. "For her to be the only young lady omitted in this very general entertainment, would have reflected an unnecessary slight upon our house."

"Oh, I am glad Jane's going," exclaimed Kate, in her good-natured way. But the others looked as black as thunder.

"Jane *can not* go," returned Mrs. Dixon, with emphasis, not attempting to suppress her passion; "the carriage will not hold five. It is impossible that our dresses can be crushed."

"I will go on the box," said my father.

"Indeed you will not," she answered. "I don't want to have to nurse you all the winter."

"You need not fear having me to nurse through my sitting outside," he rejoined. "There is an extraordinary change in the weather, and to-night it is positively warm."

My father was right about the weather. The cold which had prevailed for some days past, so intense as rarely to have been equalled in England, left us that Christmas-Eve. It was then, as he said, warm.

"I don't care whether it's warm or cold," returned Mrs. Dixon, in answer to him, "you are not going outside. Don't you see the embarrassment your obstinacy is causing?" she sharply asked, turning to me.

"The carriage can take us at twice," said my father.

"Yes! And have double fare to pay! What next?"

"Louisa," he resumed, "Jane will go to this party—for the reason I have mentioned. And she has my promise. If the carriage cannot take us all at once, it must make two courses. Now, I have said it."

For the carriage, as you will understand, was hired for the night. When the children came on, and expenses increased with the advent of the second Mrs. Dixon, our close carriage was laid down.

Mrs. Dixon's eyes caught my dress. "Where did you get that from?" she asked. "It is new."

"Yes. I ordered it at Mrs. Hill's," was my reply.

"What did it cost? Is it paid for?"

"I have not had the bill."

"Did *you* countenance this extravagance?" she

inquired, turning to my father with a crimsoned face.

"Jane told me she had no dress to appear in. I don't suppose she had, as she rarely goes out. What a time they are with this carriage!" he hastily added, escaping to the hall-door to look out for it.

"Jane, how well you look!" exclaimed Kate. "Better than I. Aunt, I do wish I had decided upon white, now that I see Jane."

"I'm sure Jane's nothing to look at."

The carriage drove up then. Papa and Charlotte came in together. Papa wanted to wait and go with me: Mrs. Dixon would not have it so. They went first, with Kate; I and Miss Betsy waited behind. Miss Betsy was in an awful temper, and kept up a running fire of reproaches at me till the carriage came back, and then all the way to the Hall. I did not answer them. My heart was full that night.

Her heart seemed full of petty spite. She would not give my name to the servants, only her own; and I heard shouted out, as we went in, "The Miss Ruperts." The rooms were very full. Miss Betsy did not attempt to find or approach the host, but pushed her way to an obscure corner, and seated me in it, and sat guard over me. There was a cluster of seats at that place, and we were hidden behind other

people. She thought—I know she did—that I should not dance if she could prevent it.

I felt sick with agitation, knowing how soon I should see *him*. I did not know him at first. He was taller—or else he looked it—and so very manly-looking, and his auburn hair had grown dark ; but he had still the merry eye and sweet smile of Lionel Rupert. He was dancing with Lord Aitesbury's daughter, Lady Augusta ; a beautiful girl, especially to my jealous eye. On Mrs. Dixon's arrival, as I heard later, he had asked after me. She just replied that I had not come ; and gave no further explanation.

"I hope you approve of the arrangements we have made for you, Lionel," she had hastened to say. "I, for one, have been active in your service."

"Oh, they are first rate," he replied. "But this affair to-night took me by surprise."

"You must look upon yourself in the light of a guest to-night, and give yourself no trouble," said Mrs. Dixon. "So many relatives are here to take it off your hands. We have planned everything for you, even to your partners. Kate—I may as well hand her over to your charge now—is to have the honour of the first dance with you."

"Well, really," cried Sir Lionel, opening his eyes rather widely, "though feeling myself, of course, under eternal obligations to my kind relatives, and hoping to

repay their exertions later, I would prefer, in the matter of partners, to exercise my own choice. Kate, my dear, we are cousins, and it will not do to take you first. The dons of the county, smarting under my neglect, would say that Lionel Rupert gave speedy evidence of not having been reared to fill the place of Sir Actæon."

And thus, in the easy, light-hearted, but very pleasant way that he used to put down people in the former days, did he put down Mrs. Dixon now. That lady found herself conducted by him to a seat of honour and left in it, Kate Arrowsmith by her side.

And I sat on, on in my obscure corner. Oh, it was a dreary evening, to me! I saw Lionel constantly, now talking to the heads of the grand families, now walking or dancing with their daughters. *No hope* was left in my heart; I have said it; but to find that Lionel never once cared to approach me with a civil word of greeting, was a pointed neglect I was not prepared for. My eyes, in spite of myself, kept filling with tears, and the bitterness at my heart was keen to bear.

"Who is that pretty girl, concealing herself there?" I heard some stranger ask. And though it was myself he alluded to, the admiration brought me no pleasure: heart and spirit were alike too depressed.

Once more I saw Lionel come down the room.

He had Kate on his arm. In passing our corner, his eye fell on the crimson velvet that nearly smothered me, and he halted.

"Miss Betsy, I really believe! looking younger than ever. You never mean to say you have been hiding yourself in this nook all the evening!"

She stood up and planted herself and her crimson velvet right before me, and she was taller than I. But I rose also, and inclined my head a little aside. He saw me, hesitated in surprise; and then a flush, deeper than the Crimea browning, dyed his face.

"Jane! Miss Dixon! Is it really you? I understood you were not here to-night." And what I said, as he clasped my hand, I did not know, and never have known.

"Wait there," he said, in hasty accents. "Excuse me a moment, Jane."

Turning away, he took Kate to her place by Mrs. Dixon. Then returned, and extended his hand to draw me out of the corner.

"What do you want with Jane?" spoke up Miss Betsy, sharply. "Let her be. She is as well here as anywhere else, especially after coming to-night in opposition to everybody. Go back to Kate: I thought you were going to dance with her."

"Kate is in no hurry," he replied. "Take my arm,

Jane." And before I had recovered my scattered senses, I was walking through the room with Sir Lionel.

"Jane, you don't look well," he said, breaking the silence. "You are thin and pale. You have not been happy."

"Not very," I answered.

"Things at home go crossly, I expect. There are children now, I hear. But to think that you should have been ensconced in that prison-corner all the evening! I cannot make it out. I thought I had seen every one present. I never even heard your name announced. Why did you not come forward and speak to me?"

"Miss Betsy took me there at once, and kept me there. She did not attempt to go up to speak to you when we came in."

"Blessed Miss Betsy! I'll be even with her. I remember her tricks of old. Jane, did you wonder that you never heard from me?—all these years!"

"I did at first. Not much afterwards. Not at all since you have become Sir Lionel."

"I was trying to build up my fortunes—as I told you—but the construction got on so slowly that I was not justified in writing: and I felt that I had been anything but justified in having spoken to you as I did. Matters are changed now."

They were indeed, for me—since I last saw Lionel. The hope of that hour had given place to the despair of this. He did not speak; and I, who felt the silence awkward, interrupted it at random.

“Have you come home to remain, Sir Lionel?”

“Yes. If my old friends will call me Lionel again, without the ‘Sir.’”

He looked at me pointedly as he spoke, and I blushed deeply. We had wandered on, I did not know where, far from the reception-rooms.

“Jane, do you think my accession to wealth and position ought to change my friends towards me?”

I blushed again, and would have stammered some words that did not come. *Why* did I blush? Because there was that, in his manner, which had set my heart wildly beating.

“Has it changed you, Jane? How silent you are! You know that when the fortunes were built up, Lionel Rupert was to want a wife. I told you that wife—if I had my wish—should be no other than Jane Dixon: I say so still. You agreed with me then, Jane: will you dissent now?”

“But—*may* we go in here?” I interrupted, in my agitation, for Lionel had opened the door of a small room, which had a blazing fire but no lights, evidently one not meant for guests.

“May we! My dear, you forget that I am in my

own house. This is to be my smoking sanctum. I hope you will allow smoking, Jane."

"I could bear up no longer, I leaned my head on the table and wept happier tears than it had ever been my lot to shed. Lionel raised it, thinking perhaps his breast was a better resting-place than the table, and there they gradually ceased to flow.

"But your position is so changed now," I sobbed. "They will say I am not good enough for Sir Lionel Rupert."

"I dare say they will—behind my back," laughed Lionel. "Especially Miss Betsy and your papa's revered wife. But they dare not say it to my face, Jane. They dare not dictate to me now; that's one comfort. I am the head of the clan."

"But, Lionel——"

"What, Jane?"

I could not say. And Lionel took from my lips the kiss he had left upon them that far-off day, and led me back to the rooms.

"I am pitifully dull here, a wretched single man," suddenly said Lionel to my father, as we were leaving—all five in the carriage. "I wish you would invite me to join your Christmas dinner to-morrow."

"With the greatest pleasure," my father promptly answered, suppressing his surprise. "You must take us as you find us."

"And next Christmas-Day—all of us being alive and well—you will come to me here," added Lionel. "I engage you beforehand."

Mrs. Dixon and Miss Betsy were full of exultation. They set down Lionel's self-invitation to Kate's score, and told that young lady that her visions of the future might be dyed in rose-colour. They ordered additions to the dinner; they ordered Kate to dress herself in her best; and when she came down in her showy attire she quite cast into the shade me and my black silk, which had only a little white lace on its low body and sleeves.

Sir Lionel came only at the hour when we were waiting to go in to dinner. He gave his arm to Mrs. Dixon, and was then placing himself by me; but Mrs. Dixon desired him to take the seat between herself and Kate. Lionel did so, and looked at me across the table with a half-smile. He was just the same Lionel as ever, free and merry.

"What, you here still, Charlotte!" he exclaimed. "I should have thought you were married, ages ago."

"It seems, sir, we are none of us in a hurry for that," answered Charlotte. "You are not married yourself, sir."

"Not yet," laughed Sir Lionel.

At dessert, to my great shock, for I was prepared for nothing of the sort, he told them I had promised

to be his wife. I thought Mrs. Dixon would have fainted on the spot. Miss Betsy sat paralyzed and speechless.

"Your wife! *Jane!*" stammered Mrs. Dixon.

"If her father will give her to me."

There was a pause; and then Mrs. Dixon spoke up, resentfully. But for the commotion she was in and the angry passion, I don't think even she would have said what she did. "It is well, Sir Lionel, that you should know Miss Dixon's circumstances have changed. She will now inherit but a small fortune. Our son—and daughters—have obliged Mr. Dixon to alter his will."

"I do not want to marry Jane's money, I want her for herself," replied Sir Lionel. "I would ask you, sir, to alter the will again, if I may so far presume," he added to my father, "and to leave Jane's name entirely out of it. As Lady Rupert, what you could give her would not be felt. The Rupert revenues are large, and I shall have the honour of proposing a good settlement to you."

My father grasped Sir Lionel's hand.

Mrs. Dixon spoke up again, her throat swelling hysterically. "It is a curiously sudden attachment, Sir Lionel! Too sudden, I fear, to last."

"Not at all sudden," answered Lionel. "I told Jane before I went away, that I had only one hope

and aim in going—that of making my purse sufficiently weighty to justify my asking her to share it.”

They sat, she and her sister, full of mortification; but Kate Arrowsmith stole round the table to whisper in my ear.

“Jane, let me stay and be your bridesmaid. I am very glad. I knew, when my aunts puffed me up about winning Sir Lionel, that it was all double-distilled nonsense, and it went in at one ear and out at the other. Indeed, I am truly glad.”

“Jane,” was Sir Lionel’s parting whisper to me that night, “I see it all. I shall take you out of this place as soon as may be. Keep your courage up a short time longer, my darling.”

He did take me—in what Mrs. Dixon protested was “indecent” haste. “And if you don’t mind, Jane Dixon, the parish will cry shame upon you!”

“I should like to hear it,” said Lionel, in his laughing way. “I will take care of Jane and the parish too, Mrs. Dixon.”

He did. And I and Charlotte have come to live at the Hall, for Lionel is now my dear husband. As he and I were sitting by the fire the other night, talking over the dinner of the evening when our people had been with us, Lionel suddenly declared we had been carrying out a command of Scripture.

“In what way, Lionel?”

"In regard to those two charming enemies of yours, Jane : Mrs. Dixon and Miss Betsy. We have been giving them food and drink, and heaping coals of fire on their heads."

"Lionel !"

"I am sure it was nothing less than coals of fire, Jane, to see you sitting at the head of my table as Lady Rupert."

ALL SOULS' EVE.

I.

ONE of the pleasantest spots in that part of France is the little commune of St. Eloi, so named after its church. It lies in the north, not many miles from Calais. One summer's day, years ago, two strange ladies were set down by the morning diligence at its only inn, or auberge, over whose door was written, Ici on loge à pied et à cheval.

The landlady came forward, in a blue petticoat and white braces; sabots on her feet and a long broom in her hand. "What did mesdames please to require?"

"Nous êtes viens—tell her, Clara—pour avoir trouver some apartments," began the elder lady, in a tumult of confusion.

"Mesdames sont Anglaises?" interrupted the woman.

"Oui," hastily answered the elder lady; "that is, Irlandaises—it's all the same—and nous besoin des

appartements. Vous comprends? Why don't you explain, Clara, standing there as silent as a post?"

"Dear mamma, if you will allow me a moment to speak." And the young lady explained, in perfect French, that her mother, being in delicate health, required quiet, pure country air, and pure country milk; and that a friend had recommended St. Eloï. Could the landlady tell them of apartments?

"Never was asked for such a thing before," responded the hostess. But at that moment a very handsome young man, tall and slender, rode up, sprang from his horse, tossed the bridle to the landlady, and spoke.

"I'll leave him here for five minutes, dame. Just put him in the stable as he is: while I go into Duterte's on an errand for my mother."

"Master Francis," cried the landlady, "these good English ladies want apartments. Do you believe there is such a thing to be had?"

The young man raised his hat to the ladies. "Could he have the honour of being of service to them?"

"Tell him, Clara—I can see he is a gentleman—he may be of more use to us than that ill-dressed landlady," cried Mrs. Fitzgerald. And the young lady, blushing, proceeded to do so.

The young man considered. "Truly, I don't know," he said. "I fear—— This spot is so very small and

retired, you see, that visitors rarely come to it, consequently no accommodation has ever been provided. Let me see—Madame Coe has a commodious house: what do you think of *la mère Coe, dame?*” turning to the landlady.

“Well, you have a talent for getting out of difficulties, Master Francis! Mother Coe has done nothing but grumble at the loneliness of her big house, since her daughters married, and at the easy life Babette leads of it. She might like some one in it for company. Suppose you were to go and see, Master Francis?”

“What a civil, gentlemanly young man!” exclaimed the lady, looking after him as he moved away. “I always took young Frenchmen to be nothing but monkeys. Ask who he is, Clara?”

He was the young gentleman at the château, the landlady answered, François Latange, and owned a good bit of property in the commune—that is, his father did. Monsieur Latange was very old now, turned seventy, and sat in the chimney-corner all day, sucking *tablettes*.* Madame Latange was not fifty yet; a scolding, never-quiet dame, who ruled despotically the house, and the village, and especially Master Francis. He was the only child, heir to all;

* A sweetmeat made of treacle and butter, answering somewhat to the English “bull’s-eye,” much patronized by French people of all ages.

but madame had a niece who lived with her, Mademoiselle Anastasie, a demoiselle of six-and-twenty with a vinegar face and a cherry-coloured coiffure, who looked after the kitchen sharper than madame did, and scolded the servants twice to her once. Master Francis was betrothed to Mademoiselle Anastasie, and they were to be married when he was twenty-one: that would be in another year. The landlady *hoped* it would be a prosperous ménage: madame had brought it all about: but some people had a notion that Master Francis was too fond of admiring pretty faces to put up exclusively with the plain one of Mademoiselle Anastasie.

She was interrupted by the return of Master Francis himself. He had seen Madame Coe (except in conversations of ceremony, like the present, that gentlewoman was familiarly styled *la mère Coe*), and thought matters might be arranged. Would the ladies allow him the honour of escorting them to her house?

Matters were arranged. Madame Coe was not less pleased to have her solitary rooms occupied, and to afford an increase of employment to her lazy maid Babette, than the ladies were to agree to her very reasonable terms. And in a few days they arrived finally with their luggage from Calais, and took up their abode in St. Eloi.

It was quite an event to the village, and every one

fell in love with Clara, who really was a very lovable young lady, with her charming beauty and her modest manners. Mrs. Fitzgerald at times got laughed at, and that was when she insisted on plunging wholesale into French. At first, a few styled them "English heretics," but they proved to be staunch Roman Catholics, with not a taint of heresy about them. Madame Latange did not take quite kindly to them. She hated and despised the English. But she condescendingly invited them to spend an occasional day at the château, where Clara had to make friends with Mademoiselle Anastasie. Master Francis and Miss Clara got on very well together. But we are coming to that by-and-by.

II.

THE time arrived for the tirage-au-sort of that year for the department of the Pas-de-Calais. Every French male subject, on approaching his twenty-first year, has to draw lots whether he shall be a soldier or not. There is no exception: the prince's son and the beggar's must alike hazard their chance. But when once the drawing is over, the equality ends; for while the poor, if they fall, have no chance but

to serve; the rich, should they have been unlucky, provide a substitute.

Heavily rose the morning, and heavily rose the hearts in St. Eloi, on the day fixed for the tirage. Many a mother, sick with anxious suspense, saw her boy depart for Calais, with a wailing prayer to the Virgin that a high number might fall to him. They were mostly peasants' sons who went from St. Eloi; and they started to walk, in their clean blue blouses and greased Sunday shoes; started with heavy steps and still more heavy hearts: but Master Francis Latange, for *his* time had now come, rode forth from his father's house, well mounted, followed by his servant. It may indeed be said that what was as death to them was sport to him. Suppose he did fall? Well, what of that? a substitute was ready. Twenty substitutes had he needed them.

As he came to la mère Coe's house, he looked up at certain of its windows. A young, anxious face was at one of them; and Master Francis leapt off his horse; which Paul, the groom, rode up and held.

"Just a word, Clare, my dearest," he said, as he entered, "to bid me God-speed."

"Now why did you come in, Francis?" she asked, in quite a cold sort of voice, though she was trembling with delight. "It is wrong."

"Bah, Clare! I know now who it was that busied herself to tell you that rubbish about my mother. It came through that interesting cousin of mine, Mademoiselle Anastasie."

"It is of no consequence who it was, Francis. If—if—it is really so"—Clara seemed to hesitate for words—"that Madame Latange forbids your visits here, we cannot continue to receive you."

"We'll talk of that another time: my horse won't stand. Farewell, my love," he whispered, snatching also another sort of farewell. "There, Clare, my own! that's what I came in for."

He was outside almost as he spoke, vaulting on his horse, and the blushing face of Clara peeped again from the window. He detected it, hidden though it nearly was by the curtain, and he smiled and bowed gallantly, riding away bareheaded till he was beyond her view.

"I wouldn't give my old clay pipe for Mam'selle Anastasie's chance now," cogitated old Paul, shrewdly, as he trotted after his young master. "But I'm not going to split upon him to madame."

Ah! those anxious hearts, those anxious faces, standing, that afternoon, at their cottage doors! The day had turned out wretchedly cold, and pouring with rain. Francis Latange was back early.

"Oh, Master Francis," cried a woman, from the first

door he came to, "what about my poor boy? His number——"

"First-rate, Mother Gris," interrupted the young man cheerily, riding on without stopping. "Ninety-six, I think."

"Thank the good God!" murmured the mother, falling upon her knees on the threshold, and drawing out her beads.

"Master Francis—a moment, sir!" implored an aged man, staggering across the road. "Has my grandson fallen?"

"I cannot tell you, Joseph," answered the young horseman, in a kindly tone; doubly kind, because he knew the news that was in store for the poor old man. "I did not get at all the numbers, you know."

"I feel he is down," moaned the old man, "though you won't tell it me, sir. Who is to work for me, in my years, when Jean shall be gone! His brother does nothing for me."

"Don't meet sorrow half-way, my poor Joseph. You shan't want a crust and a roof, even if Jean has to go."

"The saints protect him for a kind heart!" muttered the aged man, gazing after the horseman. "But—oh, Mother of Mercy, help me and my poor boy! I know he has fallen."

Mrs. Fitzgerald saw Master Francis coming, and

threw her window up. "What speed?" she called out, as Clara glided to her side.

"Tombé," replied the young man, partly checking his horse; "my number was seventeen. So I can go for a soldier, now, as soon as I please." And Clara's very lips turned white as he cantered on.

The next morning, as Clara was making the breakfast, Madame Coe came in. "I have news to tell you, Miss Clare," she began, "and I'll tell it before madame your mamma comes down—I know I did not want my mother to ferret into my private affairs when I was a demoiselle. There was a great dispute up at the château last night."

"A dispute!" repeated Clara.

"Between Master Francis and his mother. Mam'selle Adèle, who was up there yesterday doing some dress-making, told me. It seems they were talking about the substitute for Master Francis, and that brought up other matters. Madame began to speak of his marriage, and Master Francis stopped her, quite carelessly like, and said he did not intend to carry out the marriage, for he thought he and Mam'selle Anastasie would not suit each other."

Clara changed colour.

"And the joke of it was, that Mam'selle Anastasie had got her ear to the partition, along with mam'selle and heard it," continued the Mother Coe, in perfect

glee. "Then madame set-to, and wrangled with him; and Master Francis brought out that he liked somebody else better—and of course, my dear, *we* know who that is. Upon which madame's rage ran sky high, and she gave him a flat box on both his ears. He is to serve his seven years. Madame will not buy him a substitute. In her passion she swore it."

"But his father?" Clara shivered, much shocked and bewildered.

"His father! My dear, you might as well speak of a block of wood. Whatever madame decrees, is law. She tamed the spirit out of her old husband years ago."

"But the property is his—the estate, the money; it is not hers."

"Just as much his as it is mine, for any manner of use," persisted Dame Coe. "He dare not ask for a sou, that old man, and he never has one. He might as well ask madame for her head as for money to buy his son off, unless she chose to give it. No, Miss Clara. Femme Latange has not sworn to many things in her life, but she has to this. Poor Master Francis must serve."

Mademoiselle Adèle's report was substantially correct. Master Francis had declined to marry Mam'selle Anastasie, and when his mother defiantly urged the contract, he said the contract might go and

be hanged—to speak politely. So then she boxed his ears. Upon which, Master Francis, his cheeks tingling with pain, and himself with anger, boldly avowed there was only one woman in the world should call him husband, and that was Clara Fitzgerald. Madame danced about the room with rage, and finally fell on her knees and *swore* that he should serve his seven years as a soldier; she would find him no substitute. At the end of that period he would come back glad enough to take to himself his deserving cousin Anastasie.

Oh, he would serve, Francis replied with bravado, and glad to do so; anything to get away from home tyranny. But he thought Mademoiselle Anastasie need not trouble herself to wait for him.

Every one said that before the time came for the calling out of the new recruits, madame would grow cool and reasonable: she never would permit her fine son, of whom she was so proud, to serve as a soldier. It is probable that these were precisely madame's own intentions. But one early day, long before madame or St. Eloi expected it, an order descended on the village like a clap of thunder. The new recruits were to join forthwith: *for war had broken out with Russia.*

War! Francis Latange to go forth and be shot at! Madame came to her senses at once: and she ordered the horses to the lumbering, window-rattling old

family coach, that she might jog off to Calais to see about the substitute.

"Spare yourself the trouble, mother," said Francis. "I shall serve my time."

"We are at war," shrieked madame. "You'll get killed."

"I dare say I shall. And not be sorry, either. Anything for a quiet life. You might have purchased a substitute *before* the war broke out, but none shall say that Francis Latange shirked his duty now."

"The grief will kill me," wailed madame.

"Oh no, it won't," returned Francis. "You and Mam'selle Anastasie will just go on as much alive as ever, looking after the eggs, and blowing up the servants."

Madame melted into tears. "Francis, you are ungrateful. Won't you reflect that you are very dear to me: the day-star of my life, the apple of my eye?"

"Well, mother, you have taken the wrong way to show it; treating me as a child, and magging the peace out of me."

"I *will* get you a substitute, my son," she passionately broke forth. "Or, if you must go to the war, you shall have your commission."

"Listen, mother," he answered. "You have suffered my name to stand enrolled, these many weeks, as one of the ranks, and as such I will serve. Do you fear

I am a coward? Would I like the reproach of being one cast at me?"

The village all turned out to see the recruits depart; there was not a dry eye in it. Francis Latange went with the rest, and his mother flung herself down on her knees in the mud of the road, to pray the Virgin for his safe return. Mam'selle Anastasie was behind her, also on her knees, telling her beads. This was nothing extraordinary for that moment of painful emotion at St. Eloi.

Francis had stolen a meeting with Clara Fitzgerald the evening before. He had not seen much of her lately; for Clara had refused to meet him in opposition to his mother. But now that he was going away, perhaps for ever, she was as anxious as he for a parting interview. She had learnt to love him deeply, passionately; and when the last moment of farewell came, her anguish rose in convulsive sobs.

"Do not grieve so, Clara," he whispered, fondly laying her head upon his shoulder. "I may be back sooner than you think. If the war should abruptly end, as many prophesy it will, they may then send a substitute for me, and I will come home. But rest assured of one thing, Clara: that when I do come, be it sooner or later, it shall be to win you for my wife. God protect you, my love, for ever and for ever."

But the war did not come to an end, and the months dragged themselves slowly on. A letter now and then found its way from Francis to his father, and to Clara Fitzgerald. These letters gave the leading incidents in the progress of the allied armies, the landing in the Crimea, the battle of the Alma, and the long and terrible siege of Sebastopol. The summer of 1855 came round, and the troops were still *before* Sebastopol, not in it.

It would really seem, at least it did to the village, that Mrs. Fitzgerald was going to be a fixture at St. Eloi. But Mrs. Fitzgerald was not rich, and she was unwilling to quit a locality where she saved no inconsiderable portion of her income. With the exception of a week or two's absence occasionally, she had now been two years at St. Eloi.

July came in ; and with it the news of the disastrous battle of the 17th and 18th of June before Sebastopol, when the allied armies were repulsed in their attempt to take the Malakhof and the Redan. It was rumoured that the loss of the French was frightful, and St. Eloi trembled for the safety of its children. But they had to wait many days yet for the details and the names of the fallen.

The official returns came at last, and Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, who in his own august person did duty for the maire, préfet, and the rest of the

authorities in a larger town, stood in his bureau, ready to read over the list of the slain. The poor villagers were crowding in: those who had relatives at the war in dread fear, those who had not, from sympathy and curiosity. The Commissaire was opening his mouth to begin, when a movement amongst his audience took place; they were pushing each other back, treading on toes, and humbly squeezing themselves into nothing, to make way for a feeble old gentleman who was entering. It was Monsieur Latange. He had actually come out of his chimney-corner, and walked down from his château. Monsieur le Commissaire stepped forth, bowing, from behind his desk, and installed his guest in his own office-chair.

"Attention!" shouted the Commissaire. And he proceeded to read out the list in his most official voice.

"For the commune of St. Eloi. Return of those killed in the engagement of the 18th of June, before Sebastopol:

"Jean-Marie Dubuis.

"Robert Eloi Hans.

"Paul Vanderwelde.

"François Latange."

"C'est tout, mes amis, grâce à Dieu!" concluded the Commissaire, taking off his spectacles.

There was a moment of dead silence, and then a

burst of sobs and smothered cries arose from the listeners, in the midst of which the poor old Proprietor fell heavily from his chair. They picked him up, and M. le Commissaire went to the pump, in the yard behind his bureau, and fetched some water. It restored him! but the hope of his old age was gone. Père Latange had truly loved his son.

Madame Latange was a changed woman from that day. It was not only her happiness, but the *pride* of her existence, that had left her with her son's life. She never knew until now how entirely her hopes had been concentrated in that son's future. Madame spent a little fortune in masses for his soul—for which the priests prayed their best. And she ordered a handsome tombstone to be placed in the cemetery to his memory. Mademoiselle Anastasie consoled herself by accepting the addresses of a neighbouring farmer: who, having become possessed of the notion that she would now be the inheritor, had hastened to offer them.

But the grief of Clara Fitzgerald! None saw its outward signs, save in her now invariably languid manner and pallid cheek. Babette set that down to her mother's illness. For Mrs. Fitzgerald had been seized with rheumatic-fever; and lay a martyr to suffering and fractiousness. And the weeks flew on again.

III.

BOOM! boom! boom! The heavy bell of St. Eloi's Church, never heard but on state occasions, or when a fire happened in the commune, suddenly tolled out at evening twilight. Boom! boom! boom!

Clara started in nervousness from the chair she occupied in Babette's kitchen. Anxiety on her mother's account, combined with her own secret sorrow, was beginning to tell on her nerves and health.

"Babette! hark! It must be a fire."

"Sit yourself down again, Miss Clare, and look to your saucepan," responded Babette. "You are forgetting the fête of to-morrow: All Saints' Day. The bell's thundering out for that."

Clara resumed her place on the wooden chair by the stove, and went on stirring the arrowroot in the saucepan. Mrs. Fitzgerald, more peevish than ever, now she was recovering, fancied none of these messes, unless they were prepared by her daughter. So Clara made frequent visits to Babette's kitchen, to the complete satisfaction of that valuable domestic, who invariably treated her to a dish of gossip.

"My faith! isn't la patronne going to be smart to-morrow!" she began, in a half-whisper, jerking her

head in the direction of Madame Coe's *salle-à-manger*, where that lady was snugly ensconced, her feet and her petticoats over an open charcoal *chauffrette*. "She has been having her purple velvet bonnet done up with green ribbons and grapes, and she has a new cloth mantle; one of those round grey things just come up. What are you going to wear new to-morrow, Miss Clare?"

"I?" answered Clara, languidly. "Nothing."

"Nothing!" retorted Babette. "But you are going to church?"

"Of course," answered the young lady.

"And as if folks went there in old clothes to-morrow! I wouldn't show my face at church on All Saints' Day in a cap I had worn before, if I knew I should get a sweetheart by it. You have not been here on the First of November, Miss Clare?"

"No, we have been in England both years. Mamma receives her rents then. I have never been in France on the day of All Saints."

"Then it's kept in this village, I can tell you, *mademoiselle*! The grand bell, that's stunning us now, begins at five in the morning, and never leaves off all day. And the church is kept open till ten at night. You should see the candles that are burnt in it after dark. Hundreds of them."

"Why, yes!" interrupted Clara, in sudden recollec-

tion; "to-morrow night is the Eve of All Souls! The night when we pray for the dead!"

"And wherever were your wits, mademoiselle, that you have only just thought of that?" asked Babette, with that familiarity of manner characteristic of French servants: who, however, with all their freedom of speech, do not lose sight of respect.

"Is it the custom here to kneel in the cemetery and pray on the Day of the Dead?" questioned Clara.

"I should think it is the custom everywhere," answered Babette, indignation in her tone at the superfluous question. "Dry or wet, we all go, if we have any dead to pray for; and those who've not go for company. That arrowroot's thickening, Miss Clare."

"Do you go, Babette?"

"What should hinder me?" asked Babette. "And la patronne," with another jerk of the head towards the *salle-à-manger*, "gives me two hours to-morrow afternoon for church. But there's one thing I would not do, mademoiselle; and that is, go out to pray to-morrow night."

"Why not?" asked Clara.

"Catch me stirring abroad after dark on All Souls' Eve! Why, you know, Miss Clare, that the spirits come out of purgatory then, and appear to you."

"Superstitious people say so, Babette. But it is not true."

"Oh, well—if you know better than those who have seen them. *I have seen them*," concluded Babette, resolutely.

"You may have fancied so."

"I saw my sister's husband. She, hard-hearted creature! had got married again, so, of course, it was no use its appearing to *her*. I was scuttering along in the dark to the church—it's six years ago this same blessed November—and there I beheld something without form, a fluttering of wings like, just before me, high in the air. I knew it was my poor brother-in-law's soul, released for that night out of purgatory, and I fell flat down on my face in a pool of water, and never dared to get up again till some passers-by led me home. You may well fancy, mademoiselle, that I have not put myself outside the door since on All Souls' Eve. But oh, my heart, Miss Clare! have you heard what Madame Latange is going to do?"

"No," answered Clara, rousing up at the name.

"Master Francis's tombstone is completed, and in the cemetery. The most superb slab, they say: a white urn, a willow on black marble that you may see your face in, and gold letters for the inscription. It must have cost money, though, that tablet."

The spoon had dropped into the arrowroot, and lay there. Babette's voice fell to a still lower key

"She is going to church to-morrow night at seven, and when the candles are burnt out—she's to have some dozens, they say, all alight together—she goes off straight to the cemetery, to pray over this new stone. She is, Miss Clare."

"But it is not the custom to pray in the cemetery to-morrow night," debated the young lady, forgetting the spoon and the arrowroot.

"Never was yet," responded Babette. "But madame lays his death at her own door, and she thinks to expiate some of his time in purgatory, poor young gentleman, by praying-in the Day of the Dead. She'll kneel in the cemetery until the clocks have told midnight."

"All alone?" shivered Clara.

"Not she. Plenty of commères will go with her for the novelty of the thing. I wouldn't be one: and risk seeing his spirit—which is certain to appear. Do you notice how thin she's grown?"

Clara replied by a faint moan. Her face was hidden in her hands.

"She's like a shadow, compared with what she was when Master Francis was at home; and as to her dead-alive old husband—— There's your arrow-root all gone, Miss Clare!" screamed out Babette, by

way of conclusion. "And now you must begin some more! I'll put on a handful of braises and get up the fire."

All Saints' Day is the greatest religious fête, excepting Easter, in the Catholic calendar. The church decorations, the music, the rich robes of the priests, and the brilliancy of the ladies' toilets, are perfect on the fête of Toussaint. A strange contrast does the following day present, All Souls'; or, as the French emphatically express it, the Jour des Morts. There are no gaudy colours in dress then; no decorations. The world attires itself in sombre black; the glittering tints in the priests' robes are replaced by black and white; the church is hung with black, and nothing meets the eye, within it, but deaths' heads, and cross-bones, and skulls elevated on poles; whilst in the bowed, craped heads of the hushed congregation you behold real mourners. People in the large towns do not go to the cemetery, to kneel on the damp earth and pray, quite so universally as they once did; but in the small rural communes, such as St. Eloi, none omit it. The superstition, that the souls of the deceased come out of purgatory after dark on All Souls' Eve and hover in the air, waiting to appear to any of their relatives who may venture abroad, is most religiously believed by the lower orders; and by a good many of their betters also. The supposed object of their appearing

is to remind these their relatives to pray for them on the Jour des Morts : and with the first glimmer of that sombre day's dawn, the poor spirits wing their flight back to purgatory.

IV.

ALL SAINTS' DAY at last ! and a very fine one. It was to be an eventful day, take it for all in all. Breakfast over, Clara left her mother to the care of the French nurse and prepared to go out.

"Have you seen her, Miss Clare?" whispered Babette, as she traversed the passage to open the house-door for the young lady.

"Seen whom?"

"La patronne," answered Babette, with one of her favourite side-nods towards the staircase. "She'll be down by-and-by, as fine as an empress, in her brown satin gown; and she's putting white net sleeves over her old wrists, and there's a pair of straw-coloured gloves lying on the commode by her bonnet and new cloak. Won't some cats have tails!"

"Open the door, Babette. I shall be late at mass."

"Not so late as she'll be. When she comes out en grande tenue, she's always an hour at her toilet. But for the love of all the saints, mademoiselle," continued

the uncereemonious Babette, running her eyes over Clara, "why did you keep on your old mourning to-day? And all the commune so elegant!—and you with those lovely dresses in your garde-robe! I'm sure that uncle of madame your mamma's has had the mourning worn for him these six months. It's getting to look quite rusty."

"Oh, what matters it—black or white?" uttered Clara, the grieved feeling in her heart finding vent, as the woman spoke about *mourning*. "Don't keep me here, Babette. I want to go."

Babette moved her back from against the door; and Clara, passing out, found herself face to face with Madame Latange, with whom she had held no intercourse since the departure of Francis. She would willingly have shrunk away now, but Babette had shut the door.

"Don't look so scared, young lady," said the latter, in a kindly tone, to Clara's very great astonishment. "I am not going to reproach you. *He* is gone; and, to indulge ill-feeling will not bring him back again. Perhaps I might have liked you better, but you see I had set my mind on his marrying Anastasie. She was just the wife for him, for she would have kept the château together, and things in the kitchen from going to rack and ruin, and checked Francis in his generous fits."

Madame paused, but Clara did not answer

"She has been ungrateful, has Anastasie. Actually gone and promised to marry a man who is at mortal enmity with me—Farmer Brun. He won a lawsuit from me last year. Since then, my dear, it has crossed my mind that you might have made him as good a wife as she; so let us be friends. We'll go to mass together."

Clara went. Walking into church side by side with madame, to the wondering astonishment of all the gazers in it.

"Mother," said Clara, as she sat by her mother's bedside that evening, when the shades of night were gathering, "you have no objection to my accompanying Madame Latange to pray to-night?"

"Madame Latange!"

"I told you, dear mother, I met her this morning, and how pleasant she was. She is coming to see you, when to-morrow is over."

"What good's Madame Latange to do me?" querulously interrupted Mrs. Fitzgerald. "I don't like her. Breaking off her acquaintance with us, as she did, without reason!"

"She goes to-night to pray for her son; in the church and at his tombstone. May I make one of those who join her?"

"What, in the cemetery? Nonsense. You'll catch your death."

"Oh no, I shall be well wrapped up. We knew poor Francis"—Clara's voice trembled. "Let me make one to pray for the repose of his soul."

"I don't see why its repose need trouble you," returned Mrs. Fitzgerald. "Quite the contrary. I had used to think he was inclined to flirt with you, and that you encouraged him. There's nothing so unladylike for a young girl as flirting, Clara."

"Well, mamma, you will not have that to complain of again," sighed Clara. "I may go with madame?"

"Now, I don't want to be teased. My arms are in excruciating pain, and it's nothing to me whether you go or not. But if you catch rheumatic-fever in the cemetery, there'll be nobody to nurse you, recollect."

A goodly company of *commères*, as Babette had expressed it, went forth that night with Madame Latange. The great bell boomed out incessantly: the church was crowded with devout groups, bowed in silence before their many candles, the grease from which guttered down on the stone floor; and the priests, for the last time that long day, sang over their monotonous chants. A little before nine, the last candle offered up by Madame Latange had expired.

The cemetery lay beyond the village. It was a dreary walk to it at all times, between the two straight rows of poplars. The stout hearts of some of the *commères* failed; and they turned home on leaving

the church. Mademoiselle Anastasie, who was a very coward, had been brought by her aunt against her will.

"For the love of Heaven, don't go, my aunt," she implored, with chattering teeth; "wait till daylight. The shades will have returned to purgatory then, and we can all join you, and pray in peace. Should *he* appear to us, I should just die of fright."

Madame Latange's only answer was the taking of Mam'selle Anastasie by the arm, and marching her off towards the cemetery. Her serving man, Paul, walked first with a blazing torch, and the group of courageous commères huddled close behind, holding on to one another.

"But is madame herself not afraid to behold the spirit of poor Master Francis?" ventured Paul, who by no means admired the position assigned him in the march.

"My eyes have ached to see him so long that they would rejoice in the sight," replied his mistress, with valiance.

"Igh!—igh!—igh!" burst out Mam'selle Anastasie, in a succession of shrill screams. "What's that looking over the hedge?"

Considerable confusion ensued. Cries of horror. Every one laying hold of every one else's clothes.

"I tell you what it is, ladies," said the unfortunate

torchbearer, standing stock still, "if you are to frighten one like this, I can't go on in advance. Madame must forgive me when I say I'd rather lose my place first."

"Courage," commanded Madame Latange. "If you all walk linked, and bend your eyes on the ground, there'll be no danger of seeing anything. As for Mademoiselle Anastasie, should she frighten us again, I shall leave her in the hedge by herself till we come back."

The threat imposed silence on Mademoiselle Anastasie, and the procession resumed its march. It came to the gate of the cemetery, and bore on through its cold grass to the corner, where stood the tablet to the memory of Francis Latange.

It was a handsome erection of black marble: a white urn and drooping willow carved on it.

François Latange,
Fils unique de Pierre Latange et de Françoise de Brie.
Tué devant Sébastopol le 18 de Juin, 1855, âgé de 22 ans.
Priez pour lui.

They sank on their knees around the stone, and the sobs of the *mother* broke forth aloud. Clara Fitzgerald's head was pressed on the cold marble, her grief was silent; but many wept in concert with madame. And so they knelt, and sobbed, and prayed, their faces hidden: a strange group to look on, in that dark night, in that lonely graveyard!

Paul's torch was coming to an end. Rising, he proceeded to light another. This little diversion caused la mère Coe to look up. Being middle-aged and stout, she was getting tired of her kneeling position. The cramp was coming into her legs.

A hideous shriek ! an unearthly howl ! and Madame Coe, from whom they proceeded, flung her arms round the legs of the startled Paul, and buried her face against them, and howled interminably. Whatever had taken la mère Coe ?

"There he is ! his own spectre !" she burst forth, her voice shrill with terror. "I knew it would appear."

Paul raised his torch ; the unhappy devotees looked as high in the air as its light would allow. Standing close by his own tombstone, his head bending forward as if to read its inscription, was the spectre of Francis Latange. Thin, worn, his cheeks pale, his eyes sunk, there it was, with only one arm, and in a faded old suit of regimentals. No doubt the clothes he had died in.

What had been the screams of the Mother Coe to those which now ensued ? Not a saint in the calendar but was invoked with every variety of terrified aspiration ; and the wretched group started to their feet and rushed away, pell-mell, out of the haunted cemetery. Paul, dropping his torch, and ungallantly shaking off

the ladies, flew off in front; the ghost went after them; some choking, some praying, and the rest yelling. The noise penetrated nearly all the way to St. Eloi.

Clara Fitzgerald did not fly with the rest. In rising, her foot caught in a tuft of grass, and she was thrown heavily down again. Her companions were then at a distance, and she remained, clasping the marble stone, overcome with faintness and extremity of terror. The ghost came striding back again, in very unghostly fashion. It took up the flickering torch, and held it to her face.

"Clare," it gently said—and, with the words, Clara began to suspect it was no ghost, but real flesh and blood—"do I frighten *you*?"

But she was too terrified still to answer: and her teeth chattered, and her frame shook.

"I have still one arm left," he said, digging the torch in the earth, so that it still gave its light, and passing his arm round Clara. "Those terrified women must have taken me for my own spectre, for I see you have my death recorded here. Some mistake in the returns."

"But is it really you?" she said, bursting into tears. "We thought you were dead."

"So I was nearly, Clare. They took me up for dead last June, in the storming of the Malakhof. I

have come home to recruit my strength, come home for good: a one-armed man is useless as a soldier. Perhaps you too will reject me now."

Her tears flowed on. Delicious tears!

"Oh, Clare," he whispered, as he held her to him, "though I have only one arm left, it shall be found powerful to protect you through life—my cherished wife. I said I would come home to you, my darling. None knew the fervent prayer I offered up for it, save God. He heard and blessed it."

"But did you drop from the clouds?" demanded Madame Latange, in the midst of her tears, when Francis got home.

"No, mother, I dropped from the diligence. We were invalided home, *vid* Marseilles, and I reached Calais to-day. There I got a banquette place in the six-o'clock diligence. The first face I saw here was Père Duterte's; when he recovered from his wonder, he volunteered the information that a company had just started to pray for me in the cemetery. So I thought I'd go after it, and send Duterte up here first to break the news to my father. How you all screamed!"

"But you are so piteously thin and ill, Francis! And your one arm! It is dreadful."

"Never mind, mother. I shall get strong again. And for my lost arm—it might have been worse."

"François, mon cher," uttered the old man, with imploring eyes, "you will not go away again?"

"Never, father. I have sown my wild oats, and have come home to settle. If my mother will allow me."

"Yes, I will, my son," she replied, with a pointed meaning in her tone. "Mademoiselle Anastasie's going to settle herself also, Francis. With Farmer Brun."

"It is not fixed; there's nothing decided; I'm not obliged to have him, now my cousin is come home," eagerly interrupted Mademoiselle Anastasie. "And I think Farmer Brun an old bear."

"You should have discovered that before," said Madame Latange.

"*She* will make you a dutiful daughter, mother dear," whispered Francis, "though she is an English girl. Will you not try her?"

"I suppose I shall have to do so, my son. You may go to-morrow, with my love, and fetch her to dinner."

"A nice wife she'll make!" called out Mam'selle Anastasie, red with spite. "She'll never look after the eggs. They'll be half lost—you'll see! And

I know she could not make an omelette if she tried."

"I'll teach her," said madame.

"Grâce à Dieu !" cried old Père Latange.

THE END.

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